Through the Bible Again

Daily Devotional

Volume 1

Genesis to Matthew 23

By Paul Wallace

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Sedona, Arizona

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***D****edicated to my dear wife*

*with apologies for my incessant complaining about computers.*

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## 

## January

## 1/1 Genesis 1:27

*27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

This verse tells us of the reason that every life is precious. Man and woman were created in the image of God *(Imago Dei)*. We wonder how such a glorious beginning could result in the chaotic and brutal world around us. The world calls it survival of the fittest. The next chapter will tell us the real reason, sin. Our rebellion against God and His instructions for our good marred that image. Yet, in every human there is the potential for it to be restored. This is why those who believe in the Bible are opposed to abortion. The life in the womb is in the image of God and therefore is sacred. Every life is sacred. That is why God commanded us not to kill (Exodus 20:13).

Our existence should be a journey to restore the image. It is a journey to the cross where our punishment for rebellion was paid, but it goes on from there. Each day we should be dying a little more to the marred way of life and see the image brought out more clearly in all we do and say. The cross sanctifies us in the sight of God, but it is our daily walk with His Holy Spirit that restores that image in the way we live each day.

Contemplation: Am I seeing the image of God restored more fully in my life each day? Am I yielding to the restoration of the image of God by the work of the Holy Spirit in me?

## 1/2 Genesis 2:3

*3 So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.*

Every day of creation began with the evening and included the daylight hours of the next day, the morning. Only the Sabbath (seventh day) had no mention of an evening and a morning. Hebrew scholars conclude that God is still in the seventh day, resting from all His work. That is why the author of Hebrews tells us that we can enter the Sabbath rest of God (Hebrews 4).

How gracious of God to give us a practical example of the need to rest one day in seven. How much greater the grace that invites us to enter the rest of God (Hebrews 4:9-11)! We do not need to strive for our salvation; God has provided it for us in Jesus. It is by faith that we believe in the gracious nature of God and receive that salvation. Then we strive spiritually to enter the rest of God. We let His life in us prompt and perform the good works He has prepared in advance for us to do (Philippians 2:13; Ephesians 2:10). You can never be too bad to come to Jesus for salvation. It is only those who think they are good who fail to enter as they strive in their own power to please God.

Consider: Are you striving to please God or have you entered His rest?

## 1/3 Genesis 2:7

*7 then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*

The crowning act of creation was the formation of man. In the book *In His Image* Doctor Paul Brand tells of some of the miracles that take place moment by moment in the human body. The psalmist declared that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. The physical body made of the elements of the earth is an amazing work of art, engineering, and biochemistry. But without the breath of God, it would just be a beautiful sand castle. The breath of God changes everything. Consciousness is beyond the realm of scientific explanation.

God gave animals the breath of life in the previous chapter (Genesis 1:20-25,30), but when He created man, God interacted with man, breathing into his nostrils. We are made in His image and we have His own breath. What sets man above all the creatures is not simply his intelligence. It is the very design and breath of God. You were created to know God and to talk with Him. Without that relationship, you will never know satisfaction.

Prayer: Creator of my body, soul, and spirit, turn my heart away from the things that promise satisfaction but lie. Capture my heart and make it your home that I might find true satisfaction in You.

## 1/4 Genesis 2:24

*24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

Jesus quoted this verse when someone asked him about divorce (Matthew 19:5). It tells us that marriage is the union of one man with one woman. By using the words hold fast it also informs us that the man is to guard this union. In Jesus’ day there were numerous opinions about what conditions permitted divorce. Some were very restrictive and others allowed almost any reason. Jesus weighed in on the discussion by quoting Scripture. That should be the way we answer questions as well. God’s answer is the only valid answer.

The prophet Malachi wrote that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). It is the inevitable outcome of two people who have not found their satisfaction in God. They will seek to be satisfied with their spouse and find he or she cannot fill the void in their heart. The only way to avoid divorce is to be fully satisfied with God. The man must leave his parents, have his own home, and hang on to his wife, but even more importantly he must love the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. That is the only way a marriage can survive and honor God.

Prayer: Lord of all creation, help me to find my satisfaction in You. Help me to love you with my all. Help me not to demand too much from others, recognizing that they are as fallen and as weak as I am. May my life glorify You in all my relationships.

## 1/5 Genesis 3:7-8

7 *Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. 8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.*

When Eve listened to the Tempter and disobeyed the Lord, she then invited Adam to participate in her rebellion. The Apostle Paul tells us that Eve was deceived, but Adam chose to fall with her (1Timothy 2:14). Paul uses this Biblical account as the reason that women should not exercise authority over man. Both Jesus and Paul saw Genesis as an actual account of historical events from which we should learn.

What was once only sacred and beautiful, the human body, suddenly was seen through the eyes of sinners with lust and evil thoughts. Man has been trying to cover his sin ever since. We cover it with lies and justification. We try to pretend our sin is not evil. But all our coverings are a temporal attempt to hide from God. God had to provide through the blood of an animal the skins that they would wear. It is a picture of the final solution for sin, the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus, who would pay the price for our sin.

The Apostle also tells us that God is an invisible Spirit and that the manifestation of God is Jesus (Colossians 1:15). It was Jesus then who was walking in the Garden. They were hiding from the One who would ultimately be their covering, their restoration, their substitute. He asks a question that still rings in the heart of everyone who is trying to hide from Him. Where are you? (Genesis 3:9)

Consider: Is there a part of your life you are trying to cover so that the piercing eyes of Jesus do not see it? He knows exactly where you are. Confess it and ask for His help to forsake it and for the covering only He can provide.

## 1/6 Genesis 3:12-13

*12 The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?”The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”*

When Adam was confronted by God, he did what we tend to do when confronted by the Holy Spirit. He blamed Eve. If you read his response carefully, he is really blaming God. What happened to Adam’s delight in having a helper suitable to him? We are so quick to blame others, even God, for our own failures. Justifying our own shortcomings by blaming others only shows our spiritual immaturity. Unless we own our faults we will not repent and seek God’s forgiveness. Adam’s justification shows his heart had already been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Eve was no different. She blamed the Serpent. The real problem was in her heart. The right response would have been to confess that she believed the Tempter when he said God was holding out on them. She believed she could be like God through disobedience. The real blame should have gone to the desire within her own heart that the Tempter merely stirred. She believed his lies. That is the root of all our sins, believing the lies of Satan over the Word of God as the Tempter distorts the means and applications of God-given desires.

It was not evil to desire to be like God. God is holy and wise. He desires us to be like Him. The difference is in the way we reach the goal. The same was true with Satan tempting Jesus. None of the things Satan suggested were evil in themselves, but it was the way in which he tempted Jesus to obtain them.

Lesson: Remember that temptation is not only about what you are trying to obtain, but how you go about obtaining it. The Spirit of God is faithful to warn you against sin. If you fail, don’t blame God or others. Instead, see the issue in your own heart, then confess and repent.

1/7 Genesis 3:22   
*22 Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—”*

The tree of life was in the middle of the Garden of Eden, so God put Adam and Eve out of the Garden and guarded the tree with a flaming sword. Why would the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -note the use of the word “us”) not want Adam and Eve to live forever? Didn’t Jesus come to give us eternal life?

Adam and Eve had fallen. They once thought only of pure things, but now their hearts know the momentary pleasure that can be found in evil. God is aware of that as well. In that sense we are like God. The difference is that God sees the end result of evil and will never choose its temporal pleasure. Sin is a candy-coated poison that tastes delightful, but ends up destroying you. The Trinity did not want the first couple to live forever in that destructive state. There was already a better plan in place (Ephesians 1:4-5). It is found in Genesis 3:15. A male child will be born of a woman. He will defeat the Tempter. He will provide a way for man to have the power to choose what is good. That power is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of those sanctified by faith in the sacrifice of Jesus in their place. A way was made for us to live forever without the destructive power of sin in our lives (Romans 8:13).

Consider: Sometimes God withholds from us something that we think we absolutely need. We must trust that He is doing it for our good. Be assured that His desire is for our ultimate good.

## 1/8 Genesis 5:24

*24 Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.*

As the descendants of Adam multiplied, the sin nature in man became more and more pronounced. Cain killed his brother Abel. Lamech wrote a short song about his own brutality. The generations of man were on their way to such evil that only a worldwide flood could stop them.

In the midst of this corruption came Enoch. We know very little about him. His testimony is summed up in this short verse. Instead of buying into the evil pleasures of the world, he chose to walk with God. It certainly would have made him an outcast and object of derision. Still, he set his eyes on the One who could offer him more than all this world has to offer. “To walk with” in the original language implied living daily with someone. Enoch’s constant companion and guide was God.

Adam was still living at the time. Perhaps Adam told Enoch about walking with God in the Garden of Eden. Enoch had the faith that God still desired to walk with man, and he must have trusted that God could in some way deal with his sin. He was rewarded for this life of faith by not seeing death. He was taken directly to heaven (Hebrews 11:5).

Consider: Am I looking to the things of this world to satisfy me, or is my hope in God? Will I walk in the ways of this world, or will I by faith make God my constant companion?

## 1/9 Genesis 6:3 (KJV)

*3 And the LORD said, “My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.”*

Before the flood, there was a water barrier in the upper atmosphere, like a continual, thick cloud cover. It filtered much of the aging effects of the sun. Man’s DNA was as God originally designed it. Today we see DNA increasingly corrupted in each successive generation. Those early men with uncorrupted DNA lived to be hundreds of years old. But instead of increasing in a relationship with God and growing in wisdom, they grew increasingly evil. They began to take multiple wives to fulfill their lusts. They filled the earth with violence. Their thoughts were only evil continually.

This is the setting for our verse for today. The Spirit of God contends with every human being throughout his or her life. He faithfully convicts us of sin. He pleads with us to turn to God and live in a relationship with Him. He strives with us to win us over to truth and goodness.

The reason God limited our lifespan is that man is flesh. In the Hebrew there are two words that both can be translated flesh *(basar shagag)*. The first word usually means a physical body, the second can mean the same, but it also means “to err” or “to go astray”. Man is flesh gone astray. We perverted God’s intended use of the body. We took a good gift and use it in an evil way. One-hundred-twenty years is more than enough time for Him to get through to us. If by that time we have not yielded to His Spirit, we never will, not in a thousand years, not in a million. The striving of the Spirit will only bring greater judgment upon our unrepentant souls. It was for our sake that God limited our lifespan.

Prayer: Lord, help me not to resist your gentle and good Spirit today or any day of my life. Keep me from being “flesh gone astray”. Help me be as patient with others as You are with me.

## 1/10 Genesis 6:22

*22 Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.*

It took Noah and his family a hundred years to build the ark and store enough food. It is hard for us to imagine dedicating so much time and energy to the command of God. It took great faith to believe that God’s word would eventually come to pass. It is faith that pleases God (Hebrews 11:6).

Others have dedicated their lives to something they cannot see. Missionaries, pastors, and people in every walk of life take up their crosses and do something the world thinks is crazy. They love God with their all, and love their fellow man like they love their own lives. They have faith. They believe God’s word, like Noah did; and they live their whole life obeying God’s command

(John 15:10).

Noah did what God commanded and God did the rest. The animals came on board; the Lord kept the boat safe through the rising waters, and settled it on a mountain as the water receded. In a similar way, as the storms come upon our life, our nation, and our world, those who follow the commands of God by faith will be kept through it all. Jesus is our ark. All we need to do is believe and obey by faith. He will do the rest.

Meditation: God’s command to Noah was for the saving of his life and that of his family. What God commands me is for my good as well. Obeying by faith will keep me through the storms that come as I ride them out in the ark, Christ Jesus.

## 1/11 Genesis 7:1

*1 Then the LORD said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation.*

Noah’s relationship with God affected his entire family. The same was true for the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:34) and the centurion that sent for Peter (Acts 10:24, 33). One person in a real relationship, who is walking with God, will touch the lives of those closest to him or her. We can’t help but affect those in our family for better or for worse. Our rebellion against God will encourage others to do the same, or our increasing relationship with God will draw them to Him.

Noah stood out in his generation as a man who would not give in to the culture. He heard from God and lived in a radically different way. His family followed him by faith, but when the rain began to fall, their faith became sight. They realized Noah’s faith had an effect on life in the real world. It meant their salvation. They probably never doubted Noah again. The blessing for Noah’s obedience fell on them as well.

Have you thought of how your life is affecting your family and friends? The second letter of Peter calls Noah a preacher of righteousness (2Peter 2:5), but we don’t have any record of his preaching. Perhaps it was Noah’s very life each day as he built the ark and lived differently from the world around him that proclaimed the message of righteousness. Is the way you live each day drawing people to, or repelling them from, the God you proclaim?

Prayer: Lord Almighty, help my relationship with You be winsome to those who see my life, especially my family. Help me not to conform to the world, but to obey Your word. Draw me close to You throughout each and every day; I ask according to the will of Jesus my Lord.

## 1/12 Genesis 11:6-7

*6 And the LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.”*

Generations after Noah, mankind gathered to build a tower to reach into the heavens. These towers are called “ziggurats” today and the oldest are dated to this same period. Some believe they were used for astrology, while later ones had temples on top to worship the god of the city. It was man’s effort to draw near to God. But we are incapable of drawing near because of our sin nature. After the flood, God promised not to destroy all life again even though man’s heart is inclined to evil from his youth (Genesis 8:21). This attempt was a manifestation of that evil heart. God had said to spread out over the earth (Genesis 9:1). The builders said that the height of the tower can be seen from a distance and will keep them together (Genesis 11:4).

The LORD determined to multiply their languages to stop their rebellion. God intervenes in the midst of our rebellion to help us get back on track. The multiple languages caused the people to gather in smaller groups and do what God had originally commanded. This was better for sanitation, for food supply, hindered the spread of disease, and for many other reasons. What we see as a curse is often a blessing in disguise. Of course it would have been easier if they had simply obeyed God in the first place. And so it is with us. What He commands is for our good. We may rebel and face the consequences from which He was trying to save us, or He may intervene with a difficulty that helps us obey. How much better to just obey in the first place!

Prayer: Lord, I know the inclination of my heart is evil, but I desire to do Your will. Thank You for your good instructions. Help me to know them and obey them for my good and Your glory. Amen.

## 1/13 Genesis 12:13

*13 Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.*

Abram (whose name will later become Abraham) had obeyed the voice of the LORD and left his home and people and followed the LORD’S leading into Canaan. There the LORD appeared to him and promised to give the land to his descendants. But then a famine came upon the land, and Abram went to Egypt where there was food. He knew the Egyptians prized beauty and he was afraid they would kill him and take his beautiful wife. He thought of a way to save himself from this threat by having his wife say she was his sister. It was what some would call a white lie. She was, after all, his half-sister (Genesis 20:12). Abram surely justified it in his mind, but it was deception. He risked the sanctity of his own marriage to save himself.

Just as Abram thought, the Pharaoh took Sarai and gave livestock to Abram. The LORD afflicted Pharaoh’s household and he discerned that Abram had lied to him. Pharaoh took Sarai back to Abram and made him leave the country with the gifts he had given him. It looks like Abram lied and profited from it.

There are times when the LORD seems to graciously spare us from the consequences of our lack of faith. We may even seem to prosper from our sin. However, Genesis 13 tells of the problems that came from the abundance of his possessions. Financial prosperity is not always a blessing. It ended up dividing Abram’s home and causing a great deal of heartache. We wonder how the story would have been different if Abram did not give in to fear and spoke the truth, trusting in the LORD who had appeared to him. Nevertheless, God did keep his promises to Abram and graciously met with him again.

Consider: No matter how wonderful our experiences with God have been, temptation can lead us to disobedience because of our lack of faith. Things are not always as they appear. Sin has consequences in this life.

## 1/14 Genesis 13:10

*10 And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)*

The abundance of wealth became a source of contention between Abram’s and Lot’s herdsmen. It is often that way in this world. Families often split up and go their separate ways after a will is read. Abram was gracious and gave Lot the first choice of territory. Lot chose what appeared to offer the finest pasture for his flocks. Here the author inserts a footnote as the readers knew the area to be very desolate. It was green when Lot chose it, before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The passage goes on to describe Abram’s next encounter with God. God promised to give Abram’s descendants everything he could see in every direction. The meek shall inherit the earth. Who made the wisest choice, Abram or Lot? Abram obviously did, but not because he will end up with the most land, but rather because he put others first and honored God in his decisions. Godliness is its own reward.

What looks good to the eyes is often deceiving. Looks deceived Eve in the Garden (Genesis 3:6) and Lot in this passage. Abram had a heavenly vision of things that are eternal. His hopes were not in what he could see with his eyes, but in the unseen (Hebrews 11:10). Where are your hopes set?

Prayer: Eternal Lord and Maker of all things, help me to have desires that please You. Help me set my heart on things above and not on things of the earth (Colossians 3:1-2). By Your great grace, keep my eyes from deceiving my heart.

## 1/15 Genesis 14:22-23

*22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, 23 that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’*

The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah had been defeated and the cities ransacked by a group of foreign kings allied against them. Lot and his family were taken captive. Abram’s men and his allies went after them and defeated the enemy in a night battle. They took back all the spoils that were taken from the city and rescued the people that were taken to be slaves, including Lot and his family.

When Abram returned, the king of Sodom asked for the people but told Abram to keep the goods. Abram refused the goods saying he had sworn to God Most High *(El Elyon)* to take nothing lest someone say that Sodom made him rich. God had blessed Abram. Abram did not want that testimony corrupted by the goods from a wicked city. He was jealously guarding the testimony of God in his life.

We can be tempted to corrupt the testimony of God in our life as well, by giving credit to our ability or our education or worse still, some thing that is evil such as a corrupt business. We should follow the example of this man of faith and keep the testimony of the blessings in our life pointing to God alone. All we have comes from Him.

Consider: Everything we have is a gift from the Most High God. All we accomplish is because of Him. All the good we do is because He made it possible. In everything good that we do, the honor should go to God alone.

## 1/16 Genesis 15:1

*1 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”*

Abram and his servants had been successful in a sneak attack against a much larger army to rescue his nephew and the people of Sodom. The spoils from the battle included the former possessions of Sodom. Abram would not take any of it but gave it all back to the king of Sodom. His family and small band of servants now lived under the threat of a retaliatory attack, and they were no better off financially for taking that risk. His nephew who had chosen the best of the land was saved, but at what cost?

It was a short time later that the LORD appeared to Abram in a vision with a great promise. The eternal God promised to be a shield to Abram. Now that is protection! What peace of mind that must have conveyed to Abram! But that is not all. God promised that Abram’s reward would be very great. Some translations say that God would be Abram’s very great reward. A relationship with Almighty God would certainly be an exceeding great reward.

Abram was gracious to the point of risking his life for the vile people of Sodom. He demonstrated the grace that God had shown toward him (Genesis 12:16). Is this promise of being a shield and great reward only for him, or for all who will be as gracious to others as God is toward us? Could there be a greater promise than this?

Prayer: LORD, I thank you for Abram’s example of graciousness and for Your response. Help me to be as gracious to others, even to those I have reason to dislike. Set before me this prize of You being my shield and my exceeding great reward.

## 1/17 Genesis 15:16

*16 And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”*

When God entered into a covenant with Abram, God foretold that his descendants would be captives in a foreign land for 400 years. That would prove to be the length of their time in Egypt. God promised they would come out with great possessions. That is when God would give Abram’s descendants the Promised Land. Why so long a wait?

When the fourth generation returned to the land, they would be told to wipe out the inhabitants. Some would use this as an excuse to call the God of the Old Testament genocidal, but listen to what God just said. They could not come to claim the land for 400 years because the sins of the Amorites were not yet complete. God would give the people that the Israelites would displace four centuries to get their act together. But God, who is outside of time and can see the end from the beginning, knew that they would pile evil upon evil until their just sentence would be annihilation. When the Israelites entered the land, they would surely be attacked. It was God’s just punishment to have Israel preemptively destroy the wicked inhabitants.

Sometimes we would ask the same question, “Why so long a wait?” We wonder why our prayers are not answered, why wickedness seems to go unchecked, why the liar prospers and the adulterer is healthy. God sees all, every action, throughout time. He knows the right time and will have justice and righteousness prevail in the end. Our perspective is miniscule. We must learn to leave the times and methods to Him and simply trust that He is a loving and righteous God who is all-powerful and all-knowing.

Prayer: LORD, when I am tempted to doubt, when I do not understand the events in my life, teach me to trust in Your wisdom and know You will do what is right. Help me to remember how limited my understanding is compared to Yours.

## 1/18 Genesis 16:11

*11 And the angel of the LORD said to her, “Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has listened to your affliction.*

Sarai was getting up in years and Abram had no heirs. She decided she would have a child through her Egyptian servant Hagar. It was a common way of dealing with infertility. Abram agreed and Hagar became pregnant. But as could be expected, she then felt her status in the family had changed. Sarai couldn’t take that and tried to put Hagar in her place by being harsh with her. Hagar fled, but the Angel of the LORD told her to return to Sarai and submit to her. He told her she was pregnant with a boy and to name him “God hears”, because God heard her agony.

The Bible tells it like it is. In this account, everyone was in the wrong. Abram let Sarai lead him into trusting their ability instead of relying on God to bring about the promise. Then she insisted on the right to abuse Hagar. Hagar was caught in the middle, and she, too, did not trust God to resolve the problems.

The LORD’S heart is with the abused and grieving. He cared for the slave. He comforted her with promises and guided her back to where she needed to be. The time would come for her to leave with her son, but that would be later.

Whatever your status in life, God knows your afflictions. He is the God that hears the heart of every man. That does not mean that He simply is aware of what you are enduring, but that He feels for you and accepts your prayers. He will give grace to endure and will change the circumstances in His perfect time. Don’t make the mistake these heroes of the faith did by trusting in yourself. Look to God. Trust in Him. Wait for His leading. He hears!

Consider: By trying to resolve our troubles on our own, we often compound them. Know that the LORD hears. He will comfort and direct us. His timing is always best.

## 1/19 Genesis 17:5

*5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.*

As God introduced His covenant with Abram, God changed Abram’s name to Abraham. For the Hebrew people, the name of a person described their destiny. Abram means “exalted father” and Abraham means “father of a multitude.” The covenant stated that Abraham would be the father of kings, that his descendants would inherit all the land of Canaan, and that God would be their God.

Later in the passage God also changed the name of his wife Sarai to Sarah. Sarah means “princess”. In the New Testament, Saul became Paul. Paul tells us that we are all by nature children of wrath. We are all born with a sinful nature (Ephesians 2:3). But God can change our destiny, not only our destiny here on earth, but our eternal destiny as well. It is God’s intervention in the life of Abraham that made him the father of the people of faith. God can change our destinies as well.

It is God’s heart to change the destiny of every fallen man and woman to a son and daughter of God (John 1:12). That makes us princes and princesses of God. You may not see a vision or have an angel appear to you, but God may intervene in your life through His word, or one of His children, or directly influence your spirit as you pray. That is your invitation to have your destiny changed. God’s plans for you are much greater than any you have imagined for yourself.

Consider: Have you accepted God’s grace that changes your identity and your destiny? If you have, thank Him for intervening in your life. If not, the fact that you are reading this may very well be His invitation to you.

## 1/20 Genesis 18:14

*14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”*

The LORD and two angels were on their way to judge Sodom and Gomorrah when they passed by Abraham’s tent. Abraham begged them to stop, rest, and partake of a meal. After they ate, the LORD told Abraham that Sarah would have a son. She was listening to the conversation from inside the tent. She was well past her child bearing years and Abraham was almost 100 years old. She laughed at the thought of it.

This was when the LORD spoke our passage for today. He asked Sarah why she laughed. She tried to deny it, but the LORD is the God that sees all. Nothing is impossible for Him. Because our mind puts limitations on what God can do, as if the Creator can only do the things we are used to in daily life, our requests in prayer are often quite small. When the Scriptures tell us things that seem impossible, we doubt. God made everything from nothing and yet we reason that the ordinary is all that He is capable of doing. *Is anything too hard for the LORD?*

The LORD was bringing into the world through Abraham and Sarah a descendant, the promised Messiah, to bring a solution to sin. While on the LORD’S way to deal with the sins of Sodom, He was also dealing with the sin of the world. A few verses later He gives a hint of the greater miracle when He says He will bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham. (Genesis 18:18) Sarah was laughing at the impossibility of bearing a child at her age, while the LORD was doing a much greater miracle than she could ever have imagined.

Contemplation: The LORD’S thoughts are so much higher than we can imagine. His power is limitless. We see but a tiny speck of His work and doubt that He can fulfill His promises, while He is doing so much more. Let us have faith as His Spirit leads us to ask for greater things than we think are even possible.

## 1/21 Genesis 20:6

*6 Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her*.

Abraham did it again. Fearing for his life, he instructed Sarah to say she was his sister. Once again a king, this time Abimelech, takes her to his harem. By taking a relative of a foreign tribal leader for his wife, a king would make alliances with other tribes. God came to him in a dream and warned him that he would die if he touched her. God knew that Abimelech did not know she was Abraham’s wife.

Abimelech feared God and immediately returned Sarah to Abraham. He also gave Abraham animals and silver. Abraham’s excuse was that he did not think the king feared God. Instead, it was Abraham who did not trust God.

Many cultures today indeed have no fear of committing adultery. Notice that God said to touch her would be a sin against Him. Also notice that since the king was unaware she was married, it was God who kept him from touching her. Adultery is a serious matter to God. He does intervene when we are ignorant. He does punish and bring consequences for sin when we violate a marriage.

Abraham seems to profit from his sin, but that is never so. An increase in wealth is not always a sign of blessing. His testimony for all the ages bears this scar; he risked his wife to save his life. The Bible is faithful to show us the flaws even in its heroes.

Consider: Adultery is a sin against God. Because marriage is a picture of our relationship with God, we must guard our hearts against excuses we would make to compromise the sanctity of our marriage. God deals with the adulterer.

## 1/22 Genesis 21:17

*17 And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.*

Once Isaac was weaned, the tension between Sarah and Hagar resurfaced. Hagar mockingly laughed at Isaac, and for Sarah, that was the last straw. She had Abraham send Hagar and her young son, Ishmael, away. It wasn’t long before their water ran out and Hagar laid Ishmael under the shade of a bush and walked away so as not to see him die. Had she forgotten that His very name means “God hears”? And what about the promise that he would be a “wild donkey of a man”?

We often face the same trial a second time and find out if we really learned the lesson. She had a previous encounter with God and said, “I have seen the One that watches over me” (Genesis 16:13). But now that it appears her son is dying of thirst, does she believe it? Does our faith in what God has taught us override our apparent circumstances? The repeat of the test will teach us how weak or strong our faith really is. It reinforces the lesson. It teaches us to not lean on our own understanding, but rather to believe in God and the truth He has taught us.

Hagar heard the voice of the angel and then looked up and saw a well. She and her son were saved. God heard the voice of the boy. Was Hagar too angry with God to pray? How would the story have progressed had she in prayer reminded God of His promise to her and declared that she believed He heard their pleas for help? Have faith in God. Believe His Word. Don’t let circumstances shake your faith. And when the test is repeated, remember what you learned before and practice it.

Prayer: LORD, you know how easily we are discouraged by circumstances in our lives. Help me to see how You are using them to increase my faith. Help me to remember what You have taught me and to apply it in these times of difficulty.

## 1/23 Genesis 21:33

*33 Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.*

King Abimelech and his commander could see the hand of God blessing Abraham in all that Abraham did. Though they were much more powerful than Abraham, they decided it would be a good idea to have this blessed man as an ally. Abraham reminded them that Abimelech’s servants had claimed Abraham’s well. Abimelech said he didn’t know about it, so Abraham gave him seven ewes as a witness that the well was his.

We should expect greed and deception to be the world’s motivating forces. Without the sacrificial love of God in our hearts, that is the fallen nature of us all. Abraham’s gift of ewe’s was a witness of the transaction which helped to keep things honest. We should be as objective and clear in dealing with the world.

Abraham knew it was only God that had caused a more powerful leader to become an ally with him. It meant protection, but it also meant that Abraham’s work would no longer be stolen by Abimelech’s servants. When the injustice had occurred, Abraham waited on God to rectify the situation. God was faithful in God’s perfect time. That prompted Abraham to have another sign of what had taken place, but this sign, the tamarisk tree became a tangible reminder of his commitment to God. He called God “Lord God Everlasting” *(YHWH El Olam)*. It was Abraham’s way of reminding himself of God’s faithfulness and constancy.

Consider: When God shows His faithfulness to you and your heart is encouraged to place your complete trust in Him, what do you do to remember the event? Let us treasure these times when our doubts are answered by His wonderful work in our life.

## 1/24 Genesis 22:18

*18 and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”*

God tested Abraham by asking him to take his son of promise, Isaac, to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him there. At the last second, the angel of the LORD stopped Abraham and provided a ram as a substitute offering. Abraham had such faith in the promise of God that he believed God would raise Isaac from the dead. This act of belief in God was credited to Abraham as righteousness.

God then reaffirmed His promise to make Abraham’s descendants numerous, to give them the land of Canaan, and to bless the world through the offspring of Abraham. The Jewish people did indeed multiply into a great nation and possess that land. Even after a 1900-year-period of absence they repossessed the land promised to them.

But what about blessing the world? The Hebrew word for “offspring” is singular. It can mean all the descendants as a single group or it can mean one individual. As a group, the Jewish people have disproportionately received more Nobel Awards than any other race. But the ultimate fulfillment of the promise is the individual offspring of Abraham, Jesus. The world has been blessed by His teaching. Even greater still, those who receive Him as Lord of their lives have become eternally blessed by the salvation He earned on our behalf. We are in every part of the world, and the transformation He brings to our lives blesses those

we meet.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord Jesus, that this promise has reached even to me. May Your life in me be a blessing to my part of the world as I yield to Your love.

## 1/25 Genesis 24:7

*7 The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, ‘To your offspring I will give this land,’ he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there.*

The servant of Abraham was made to take an oath that he would find a wife for Isaac from Abraham’s relatives. When the servant questioned what he was to do if the woman would not return with him, Abraham assured him that God would intervene and make it happen with angelic assistance. Abraham added that if it was not so, the servant would be released from his oath. Abraham had confidence because of his past experience with God including the promises God had given him.

Isaac is a type or shadow of Messiah. Isaac carried the wood up the slopes of Mount Moriah on which he was to die just as Jesus would do in the distant future. God saved Isaac just as He would save Jesus, but in a different manner. After Jesus was saved through death, the servant, the Holy Spirit, goes out to find His bride. He has angelic assistance for in Hebrews it says that angels are sent to those who will be heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14). He invites us to be the bride of the One who has inherited all things. He introduces us to the Son and gives us gifts of the Spirit. One day He will carry us to the presence of the Son and we will forever be with Him. The parallels should make your heart beat faster.

If you are reading this devotional, you have probably had encounters with God in your past that have given you confidence that what God has promised will certainly come to pass. Either through death or Jesus’ return, we will be brought to the wedding feast of the Lamb and forever be with Him (Revelation 19:7). We can be as certain as Abraham was about God’s faithfulness to keep his promises.

Praise: I praise you O LORD of heaven and earth that You would stoop to choose one like me. How gracious and merciful You are; how loving and kind! What more could I hope for than eternity with One as wonderful as You?

## 1/26 Genesis 24:58

*58 And they called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” She said, “I will go.”*

In Western culture, we don’t think much of arranged marriages, but much of the world still has that custom. Abraham had sent his servant to find a bride for Isaac. The servant asked God to reveal who it was by having her come to the well and offer to draw water for him and the camels. He had men with him who could have drawn the water, and camels do drink a lot of water, so this was a pretty demanding sign. Rebecca did just that, and she was a relative. The servant knew this was the woman.

Then he went to her parents and told them what had just happened. They realized it was of the LORD and were willing to send her to Isaac as a bride, but they wanted her to stay ten days so they could say goodbye. The servant was eager to return and asked to go the next day. Imagine your child engaged and leaving all in one day, never to see her again. Her parents gave Rebecca the choice, and she decided to go that next morning.

This is a picture of our betrothal with Christ. The Holy Spirit invites us to be His bride by receiving salvation. When we accept, we often are drawn by the world, relationships, and our old passions and pleasures. To leave it all behind and go to a place we’ve never been before and start a whole new life seems too extreme, but that is what the Spirit calls us to do. In Christ, the old is gone and the new has come. (2Corinthians 5:17). We say goodbye to our old world and enter a new life with Him

Consider: The question is for all who would come to Jesus: Will you follow the Holy Spirit to an all-consuming relationship with Jesus? Are you still saying goodbye on an extended departure, or have you, like Rebecca, said, “I will go!”?

## 1/27 Genesis 25:33

*33 Jacob said, “Swear to me now.” So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob.*

Esau had come in from hunting all day and was famished. He smelled Jacob’s lintel stew and pleaded for a bowl. Jacob knew of Esau’s value of the carnal over the spiritual and so offered him a bowl in exchange for his birthright. The birthright in later Israel meant a double portion of the inheritance and the leadership of the family.

Esau justified the exchange by saying his birthright wouldn’t do any good if he died of starvation. One day without food will not kill you. Esau simply favored the carnal and immediate gratification. Esau made the exchange and forever regretted it.

The scene is repeated millions of times throughout the world. Our old nature will justify giving up precious things for momentary gratification. We give up things like virginity, holiness, character, and some even give up their very soul. Jacob was cunning, but the enemy of our soul is even more cunning. Guard yourself against justifying giving up what is priceless in a moment of physical need. He is watching for our moment of weakness. In that moment, look to the LORD for His strength and help to resist the temptation.

Prayer: LORD, in that hour of testing, remind me of this story and of the price that we regret forever. Help me to hold dear what is truly of value, the things that last forever.

## 1/28 Genesis 26:7

*7 When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,” for he feared to say, “My wife,” thinking, “lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah,” because she was attractive in appearance.*

Like father like son. Isaac had surely heard the stories about his father’s encounters in Egypt and with the Philistines and how he claimed Sarah was his sister to save himself, and yet departed more prosperous than when he arrived. Isaac followed his father’s bad example. Fortunately, no one tried to take Rebecca before it was discovered that they were husband and wife. Abraham’s use of “sister” was half true. For Isaac, it was a complete lie. The sin of the father was compounded in the son.

Once again we see the grace of God allowing Isaac not to suffer the defilement of his wife and even blessing his harvest. Unlike his father, he did not repeat this sin. We all have an example set for us by our parents.

Some things we learned from them were good, and others were sinful patterns. We tend to follow what we saw in them. Believers have the power to break those patterns and set godly patterns for their own children. However, like Abraham, we will fall short. When we do, we should be honest with our children and tell them the consequences. Help them to learn the right way even when we fail to walk in it. They won’t think less of you. Your heart to please God in your thoughts and actions is one of the greatest legacies you can leave to your children.

Consider: What patterns are you following from your parents that should be broken with the help of the Holy Spirit? What have your children seen in you that you need to warn them not to follow? Even if they are grown and no longer in your home, you can ask for forgiveness and encourage them to set an example for the next generation.

## 1/29 Genesis 29:25

*25 And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?”*

The obvious answer to the question in the above verse is that Jacob reaped what he had sown. He had deceived his own father into giving him the blessing due Esau, and now his uncle Laban has deceived him into marrying Leah. God has a way of helping us see our sins. He brings people into our lives that show us how we act toward Him. Jacob thought he could make deals with God while harboring hidden motives. (Genesis 28:20-21). God sees our hearts, and He will help us to see them too.

Laban saw that Jacob was a good worker and was blessed in what he did. That was why he tricked him into fourteen years of service to him. God will deal with Laban too. We see ourselves in others. Jacob will have to go through a long round of deceiving and being deceived before he faces his own heart. God is faithful to help us. It will cause us to be very frustrated, but it is for our eternal good.

Consider: Have you noticed a recurrent problem with the people God has brought into your life? Have you examined your heart to see if there is something there that you detest that is really at the root of your issues with others? Does it act as a mirror to show you what you are like to God? If the Holy Spirit has shown you the sin in your own heart, ask for forgiveness. Accept that forgiveness and pass it on to those who offend you.

## 1/30 Genesis 31:29

*29 It is in my power to do you harm. But the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, ‘Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.’*

Jacob and Laban continued to trick and cheat each the other for twenty years. God told Jacob that it was time to return to his home. God promised to be with Jacob. Instead of trusting God to protect him and telling Laban he was leaving, he waited until Laban was away and tried to sneak off. Laban got wind of the departure and gathered his men and pursued Jacob and his family.

God intervened by giving Laban a dream in which he was told, “Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad” (Genesis 31:24). If Laban was to not even speak a bad word to Jacob, surely he was also not to harm him or to take his flocks. Jacob defended his departure by saying God had told him to leave and that Laban had been unfair in his practices. Laban simply told Jacob that everything Jacob now possessed came from him. They made an oath not to harm the other and Laban departed. It makes me wonder what would have happened had God not given Laban the dream.

Our days are ordered by the LORD. We do live in a fallen world where innocent people are hurt by the sin of others. Still, God can intervene in situations and restrain man from evil. We have no idea how many time God has intervened on our behalf. We are rarely told by the parties that would harm us what made them stop their plans. We are often even unaware there was a plan.

There are also times when the evil of others does affect our lives in very harsh ways. We wonder why God did not intervene. The God who sees all, including the future, knows what will be to our benefit in the eternal sense. We cannot say that because He did not restrain evil in one case that He does not love us or care. It was the free will of fallen man that harmed us. We can say that He will be with us if we draw near to Him. He will help us gain from the difficulty in ways beyond our comprehension.

Consider: If Jacob had trusted God and faced Laban when he was departing, God would have been with Jacob. If we will trust God and do things the right way, even though it is difficult, God will be with us also. It may not be easy, but it will be good.

## 1/31 Genesis 32:9-10

*9 And Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,’ 10 I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.*

Jacob received the report that Esau and four hundred men were on their way to meet him. His last word from Esau, twenty years earlier, was that Esau would kill him. Jacob divided up his family and flocks into three groups. He sent the first group ahead hoping that if it was attacked, the other group would escape. As a last resort, he prayed, and his prayer showed that his heart was changing.

He began by acknowledging the God of his fathers as the LORD. Remember that when he left his home, he was trying to make a deal with God. “If you will bless me and bring me back safely, then the LORD will be my God.” Well, he’s not back yet, and he is acknowledging the LORD as God. Then he reminds God of the word that God spoke to him. He is putting faith in that word. An even more promising expression is that he sees how unworthy he has been of even the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and faithfulness shown to him. He saw how God had kept His word to bless him. It is the first time one of the patriarchs used the phrase, “steadfast love and faithfulness”, to describe God’s goodness, and it will be used throughout the rest of the Old Testament.

Jacob now calls himself a servant of the LORD. Fear of death has a way of humbling us to face reality. The proud and cocky schemer is a humbled man who is hoping in the word of God. He will still lean on his own cunning, sending gifts to Esau to soften him up, but his heart is beginning to look to the LORD in humility.

Consider: Where are you in your spiritual journey? Have you considered all the deeds of steadfast love and faithfulness of God toward you? Do you see how unworthy you are to receive it? Are you relying on your cunning or on the Word of the LORD? Have you recognized that you are a servant of your Creator?

February

## 2/1 Genesis 33:4

*4 But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.*

There are a number of extremely dramatic moments in the Bible. This is certainly one of them. During the past twenty years Jacob lived in fear of Esau’s death threat. Esau had grown and prospered and put behind him his anger over Jacob’s conniving. Jacob expected a sword in Esau’s hand, but instead received a warm hug. Theirs was an historic sibling rivalry, but time and their individual successes had healed the wounds.

Certainly, God had answered Jacob’s prayer for safety even before Jacob prayed. The dread and fear through all those years was for naught. Jacob should have trusted the LORD and His promises from the very beginning. After all, he had the birthright, the blessing, and most of all, the word of the LORD spoken to him at Bethel.

Most of us will face, or have already, something similar. Whether it is sibling rivalry, or rivalry in the office or the neighborhood, we will find that personal conflict is inevitable. Whether it is no fault of our own, or partially reaping what we have sown, if we cast our care on the LORD, obey His Word (as Jacob did in obeying God’s command to return to his land), and trust in the promises of God found in His Word, we will find that the LORD will help us face our fears and find that they are not all that we thought them to be. Many times we will find they are nothing at all. There is great peace to be found in trusting the LORD and His Word. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Consider: Most of our fears are completely unnecessary. Even when we do face difficulty, if we will trust the LORD, He will use it for our good. Why live with worry when we can live in confident and peaceful trust in the LORD?

2/2 Genesis 35:2-3

*2 So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments. 3 Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.”*

God called Jacob back to the place He had first appeared to him. Remember Jacob had made a promise that if the LORD brought him back safely, then he would make Him his God. Even though God has spoken to him, preserved him, and prospered him beyond his wildest dreams, Jacob had allowed those in his family to keep little idols to worship. God patiently puts up with our superstitions, but there comes a point in time when we must forsake them all and rely on Him alone. There is a turning point when we must clean up our life if we are to go on with Him.

Jacob referred to God as “the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.” There is no God like our God. He has never changed, and He will be the same with you. He will answer you in the day of your distress if you will look to Him alone. He will be with you wherever you go. That knowledge is comfort for our souls and peace for our hearts.

Consider: Are you still hanging on to little gods, trusting in money, in your intellect, or in a person? Have you come to the point when it is time to clean up your life and worship God alone? Do you know Him as the God who answers you in the day of your distress and has been with you wherever you have gone? Worship Him alone!

## **2/3 Genesis 35:10-11**

*10 And God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name. “So he called his name Israel. 11 And God said to him, “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body.*

God is out to transform you and me. It is the theme of the entire Bible. We fell from our original sinless state, from Eden into depravity. We are separated from God. But the grace of God reaches to us and works in our lives to change us. Jacob means “supplanter.” After twenty years under someone as scheming as himself, a wrestling match with God, and an encounter with near death, Jacob is ready to become “one who rules as God.” That is the meaning of his new name, “Israel.” The nation will be named after him.

God reveals Himself to us in His names. Right after changing Jacob’s name, God declared that His own name is *El Shaddai*, which means “God all-powerful.” Only He can change a person’s heart. He orchestrates events in our lives to humble us and cause us to look to Him for our needs. God is preparing us for a life of eternal significance now and for eternity in His presence. With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

Consider: Can you look back and see the invisible hand of God shaping your life? Jacob was limping because of his encounter with God, but that is what he needed to stop relying on his own clever schemes. The time during which he spent working for his shrewd uncle was a tool of God. Have there been people in your life who caused you so much frustration that you, too, cried out to God? All the difficulty we encounter can work for our eternal good. Learn to trust in God Almighty. He can finish the work He has started in you. He is bringing you home.

## 2/4 Genesis 39:9

*9 He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”*

Joseph had been sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. Egypt’s Captain of the Guard, Potiphar, had purchased Joseph and found that he could be trusted. Everything Joseph did was blessed by God, so Potiphar made him the manager of his household.

The wife of Potiphar lusted after Joseph. He was a young, handsome man in his prime. She tried to lure him into having relations with her. Joseph answered with our verse for today. He respected the honor and trust given him by Potiphar, and that was reason enough to resist her invitation. But the greatest reason to resist was that to take another man’s wife would be a great wickedness and a sin against God.

Why is adultery considered such a wicked thing in the Bible? It is because marriage is a picture of our relationship with God. Idolatry is compared to adultery in Scripture. God loves us and wants us to be His. After all He has done for us in giving us life, provision, faith, and all good things, how can we turn to some worthless thing and give ourselves to it? Adultery also violates the covenant commitment a couple has made with one another. It separates what God has joined.

Joseph forsook momentary pleasure because he valued the things that last. He had a fear of the righteous judgments of God. He valued the honor given him by Potiphar, but even more, he valued the blessing of God on his life.

Prayer: Lord, keep my heart devoted to You. When temptation comes, help me to see it for the lie that it is. Keep my heart grateful for Your blessings in my life. May my love for You dominate my desires.

## 2/5 Genesis 39:21

*21 But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.*

Potiphar’s wife felt humiliated by Joseph’s lack of interest in her. Lust often turns to hate when it is spurned. She falsely accused him of trying to sleep with her; as a result Potiphar threw Joseph in prison. This young man resisted temptation and was faithful and blessed, but that didn’t keep him from being affected by the sins of others. If you simply look at the circumstances, it seems so unfair, but God has a much greater plan in mind than Joseph could ever have imagined.

The prison keeper saw that Joseph had the blessing of God on all that he did. He gave charge of the entire prison to him. Joseph’s circumstances were unfair, but God’s steadfast love remained faithful. It was God’s influence on the prison keeper that had Joseph promoted.

This fallen world is filled with situations that are unfair, but there is one thing we can count on. God will be with us through it all! That changes everything. His steadfast love will never be taken from us. God will move the hearts that need to be moved to fulfill His purposes in you.

Meditation: Is there any greater gift than God’s presence with us and His steadfast love? Realize these gifts are yours in spite of your present circumstances.

## 2/6 Genesis 41:38

*38 And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?”*

Joseph served for years in the prison, probably wondering if the dreams God had given him would ever come to pass. One day the butler and baker of the Pharaoh were put in prison in Joseph’s care. They had dreams, and Joseph interpreted the dreams with the help of the LORD. One of the men was restored to his position, but he did not keep his promise to tell Pharaoh about the injustice done to Joseph. Surely Joseph’s hopes were raised, and as time passed he must have become discouraged.

Then Pharaoh had a dream and the butler remembered Joseph. The LORD helped Joseph interpret the Pharaoh’s dream. Pharaoh recognized that Joseph was wise because the Spirit of God was in him. He made him second in command of the entire nation and in charge of storing up grain for the coming famine.

Joseph’s story is one of patient perseverance. The many years of injustice did not deter his faithfulness to God. He persisted regardless of the circumstances. Many times in life we will not see what God is doing, but if we are to be useful for God’s service, we must have the same patient, faithful perseverance. Our communion with the Holy Spirit can grow deeper in times of trial so that when the opportunity comes to make a real difference, we are able to hear His voice.

Prayer: LORD, please help me to patiently and faithfully persevere regardless of My circumstances. Deepen my communion with Your Spirit so that I learn to discern Your voice from my own. And when the time comes that I may be useful to You, help me follow Joseph’s example of giving You all the credit.

## 2/7 Genesis 44:33

*33 Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers.*

When the famine struck the land, the half-brothers of Joseph came to Egypt for food, but Israel kept Joseph’s full brother, Benjamin, at home. His bothers did not recognize Joseph. He was now more than thirty-years-old, dressed in Egyptian clothing and speaking another language. Joseph implied that they were spies and interrogated them. They were sure their sin had caught up with them. It had! But it was not to punish them, but rather to save them. They mentioned their youngest brother at home, so Joseph kept Simeon until they could prove the truth of their statements by bringing Benjamin.

Israel refused to let Benjamin go to Egypt until their food ran out. When they finally came to Egypt, Joseph had them dine with him. Then he had his servant hide his royal cup in Benjamin’s bag of grain. Soon after they left for home, the servant went after them. Finding Joseph’s cup in Benjamin’s bag, he ordered him to become Joseph’s slave.

Judah had made a pledge to his father to bring the boy back safe. He offered himself as a slave instead of Benjamin. Joseph is about to reveal himself to his brothers and end their anxiety, and here we have an important shadow of God’s plan. Judah is the line from which Jesus came into the world. The descendant of Judah, Jesus, will offer himself in our place. We were slaves of sin, but Jesus pledged to the Father to bring us home safely. He put Himself in our place. In that atoning sacrifice God revealed Himself to us as the God who loves us and would do anything possible to have us with Him forever.

Consider: God has planned each day of our lives. He put these pictures before us in history so that when His plan unfolds, we will understand how much He loves us. Take a moment to rejoice in how much you are loved by Him.

## 2/8 Genesis 45:5

*5 And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.*

Joseph could see the plan of God unfolding. Instead of focusing on all the injustice he suffered and the hardship he endured, he chose to focus on what God was doing through it all. Our perspective makes all the difference in our attitudes. When we see the invisible hand of God guiding us through life and bringing good out of what was meant for evil, we can have a forgiving attitude toward those who wrong us.

We are told so little about Joseph’s spiritual life, but we can see through his words that he consistently looked to God. To see life from the heavenly perspective is to wear proverbial “God glasses”. Most of the world sees life from a self-centered viewpoint. Joseph learned through his hardships that God has a completely different picture before Him. It takes faith and trust for us to wait to see a glimpse of what God sees.

God values every life for each is made in the image of God. The transformation from sinner to saint is the heart of God for each person. The conviction of God coupled with Joseph’s forgiveness were surely steps in the transformation of his brothers. That was greatest gift Joseph could have given his father, Israel. It is one of the greatest gifts we can give our heavenly Father. Is there someone who, by the grace of God, you need to forgive?

Consider: When life seems to be overwhelming and looks so unfair, ask yourself, “Do I have “God glasses” on, or am I wearing “me glasses”?

## 2/9 Genesis 49:10

*10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.*

As Jacob prepared to die, he gave a blessing to each of his sons. They are already grown and have children and grandchildren of their own. He is blessing successive generations of their lineage. This is an example we should follow as we pray for the generations that follow us. What spiritual legacy do we leave them?

In praying for Judah, he prophesied that his lineage would reign over the family, defeat of foreign powers, and that people would obey him. The first king of Israel came from the tribe of Benjamin, but all future kings came from the line of Judah. The King of kings, Jesus, is from the line of Judah as well. He has defeated the ultimate enemy, death. To Him shall be the obedience of the peoples!

Rabbis also see this prophecy regarding Judah as predicting the future Messiah. He has come, and His victory over the enemy was greater than anyone imagined. Our obedience should be given to the King of kings, the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

Consider that Moses will also emphasize obeying the coming Messiah. Obedience to this most gracious potentate is for our good and always brings a blessing. Am I obeying my King from a heart of love and gratitude?

## 2/10 Exodus 1:17

*17 But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.*

When a new Pharaoh came to power, he feared the increasing number of Hebrews. He made them work as slaves in his construction projects. He also ordered their midwives to kill any male babies that were born. It was an order directly from Pharaoh. God’s word tells us that God is the one that puts people in power and that we should submit to their rule. That was great when Joseph was in power under a good Pharaoh, but what if the ruler orders you to disobey God?

The midwives knew that God is the ultimate authority. Their fear of God’s justice was greater than their fear of the Pharaoh’s. You can be sure God’s justice will prevail whether in this life or the next. The midwives would not obey the evil edict. They made an excuse to Pharaoh that the Hebrew women gave birth before they arrived to help. God blessed these two women with children of their own for their faithfulness to Him and kept them from being punished by Pharaoh.

Pharaoh made the order public so that Hebrews had to kill their own baby boys or face the consequences. Today babies are killed out of fear too. Some fear that they cannot provide for the baby or that the baby will interfere with the mother’s life. There is little fear of the justice of God or hope in the blessing that comes from obedience. Sometimes the absence of the fear of God stems from a lack of faith, and other times it is from ignorance of the Word of God.

Consider how you can lovingly encourage women to keep their babies by sharing this story. Guide them to one of the many Christian facilities that will help them or arrange for an adoption. Help them overcome their fear of the future with faith in God. Each and every life is made in God’s image and is precious to Him.

## 2/11 Exodus 2:10

*10 When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, “Because,” she said, “I drew him out of*

*the water.”*

The invisible hand of Providence is moving in every detail of all of our lives. Pharaoh had ordered all Hebrew baby boys to be thrown into the Nile. Moses’ mother kept him hidden as long as she could and then obeyed, sort of. She did cast him into the Nile in a basket she had made out of papyrus reeds. She placed him in it and set it among the reeds in the Nile. Moses’ older sister watched to see what would happen.

The daughter of Pharaoh came to bathe and saw the basket. When she opened it and heard the baby cry, her motherly instincts were stirred, and she adopted the baby as her own. She sent Moses’ sister to find someone to nurse the baby. Of course his sister brought Moses’ real mother to be the nurse until the baby could be weaned. She could share with him his real identity and teach him about the God of Abraham.

The Egyptian princess gave him a name that sounded like the Hebrew word for “draw out”. Little did she realize that her choice of his name was also his destiny. As the instrument of God, he would draw the Hebrew nation out of Egypt.

Consider: The same invisible hand of God is working in the midst of the evil edicts of our world system. We live in a fallen world that seems so brutal and chaotic, but if we look carefully, we can see another power at work. It is the power of redemption, changing what man meant for evil, offering hope, and pointing us upward. Don’t let your circumstances cause you to despair. Look for the invisible hand of Providence.

## 2/12 Exodus 2:11-12

*11 One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. 12 He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.*

This is the Chuck Norris’ or Bruce Willis’ movie way of dealing with the bad guys. Your people are being abused, so you go out and deal with them. Moses had good intentions, but he was completely out of God’s will. He did not wait for the Lord to give him direction as to how to help his people. God had something in mind that would amaze the world and Bible readers ever since. The Hebrews whom Moses rescued must have told others and the word spread until Moses had to flee.

God used the next 40 years to train Moses in the way of God. He had to learn to listen for His voice and wait on His direction. In the process, Moses also learned about the desert in the Sinai and how to herd flocks of sheep that are very much like the flock of people he will eventually lead there. God uses everything, and He used Moses’ impetuous action to send him to school in the ways of God.

The lesson for us is not merely to refrain from acting suddenly or in violence; it is to learn the ways of God. The Scriptures tell us that *7 He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.* Psalm 103:7(KJV) We will only learn the ways of the Lord when we spend time with Him, waiting for Him. His ways are so much higher than our own.

Perhaps you are dealing with the long lasting consequences of an impetuous action. God will use this time to teach you just like He used Moses’ time in the desert to teach him. Learn to wait for God and hear His voice.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to wait for You and not run ahead on my own. Remind me that without You, I can do nothing. Your way is always so much better than any choice I would make without You.

## 2/13 Exodus 3:14

*14 God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.”And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”*

Moses had been herding sheep and goats for the last 40 years in Egypt. He saw a bush ablaze on a mountain side and went up to see it. God called to Moses from the bush to go back to Egypt and bring out the nation of Israel. When Moses asked who he should say had sent him, God responded with the above verse.

This is the first time in Scripture that God declared His name. For the Hebrews, a name was a brief description of what your life was about. What can we learn about God from this name, I AM? It is always present tense. If we speak of I AM in the past, present, or future, He is always present. In other words He transcends time. Your birth, today, and the day you enter heaven are all before Him right now and always.

He is unchanging. He will always be who He is. Because He is always present in all time at once, He does not grow or decay as with us creatures who are bound by time. He will ever be the Eternal One. His attributes will forever be the same. He declared that He is love. (1John 4:8) He will always be love and has always been love. He will always be One that expresses steadfast love and faithfulness.

For Moses this meant that He is the exact same God that made the promises to the patriarchs. He had not changed, nor had His promises changed. The land that Moses would lead them to was the land God promised to Abraham. Moses could see that what he was about to do, frightening as it was, had forever been before God. God already sees the outcome. His direction to our today results in the future He already sees. What a reassurance this must have been when Moses met with what seemed to be fruitless efforts!

Mediation: The God who instructs me today knows the result of my obedience. Whether I meet with resistance from the world or not, God already knows the good outcome.

## 2/14 Exodus 4:11

*11 Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?*

Moses was trying to get out of the frightening assignment of going to Pharaoh and demanding that he release the Israelites so they could go and worship in the desert. Moses’ excuse was that he was not a good speaker. Perhaps he had some kind of speech impediment or maybe he was like most of us who fear speaking in public. Our verse for today was God’s response. How can you excuse yourself from the assignment by Almighty God by saying He didn’t equip you properly? God was pointing out to Moses the absurdity of his excuse by reminding Moses that it was He who made his mouth.

Most of our excuses are something of this nature. We should be reminded how absurd our excuses are. If God calls us to a task, He will certainly equip us for it. Sometimes our handicap is a strength when it causes us to rely on the LORD. (2Corinthians 12:9)

My grandson was born with a cleft lip and palate. The LORD reminded me of this verse. God made his mouth. He also provided one of the most advanced surgeons in the field of cleft palate repair right in the very same town. God also gave this grandson a spirit that was tough enough to go through the surgeries like a champion. What an amazing God we serve! He can provide a solution to our handicap or use the handicap to strengthen us and make us even more productive than we would be without it.

God was asking Moses to have faith in Him, the Creator of all things, and to trust Him. He asks the same of us. We might not have as grand a task as that of Moses, but our assignments can be frightening none the less. It takes trust and faith in God to forgive an offender, to love after being hurt, to speak about our faith, or to stand up against evil. The One who assigns us the task will equip us for it with His very presence.

Prayer: LORD, help me remember this truth and to not make excuses. Remind me how absurd my excuses are. Help me step forward to Your assignments with faith and trust in You, my Creator.

## 2/15 Exodus 5:21

*21 and they said to them, “The LORD look on you and judge, because you have made us stink in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.”*

Moses went to Pharaoh and gave him God’s demand to let Israel go and serve (worship) Him in the wilderness. Pharaoh decided they made a request like that because they had too much time on their hands and were lazy. So he made them gather their own straw to make bricks. It is interesting to note that the ancient bricks of Egypt did contain straw except for a period which correlates to this story in which some were made without straw. The straw made the bricks much stronger.

When the people couldn’t keep up with their daily quota, they blamed Moses. The day before, they were praising God for sending Moses. Now they are cursing him. Such is the life of the obedient servant of God. People rarely understand what you do or your motives for doing it. When the ungodly see you act, they think of their own motivations for doing things and assign them to you. In the New Testament, The Apostle Paul wrote, “The more I love, the less I am loved.”

Just because you don’t get the results you expected when you obey God, don’t think you have failed. Obedience is success. The results are up to God. He is simply looking for those who will be faithful to let Him lead. It is hard not to be discouraged when those you are trying to help turn against you, but someday, here or in heaven, they will understand. Just be that successful servant who faithfully obeys.

Consider: Once again God is asking Moses to act in faith and persevere. Remember, God is already seeing the future and knows the end result. There is no safer, saner thing to do than to obey God, regardless of how things appear.

## 2/16 Exodus 6:7

*7 I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.*

The Israelites were discouraged because Moses first encounter with Pharaoh resulted in more hardship for them. God spoke to Moses again and told him to tell them the verse for today. What a promise it is! To be Almighty God’s people is the greatest honor a nation could have. They would have divine protection, provision, and most of all revelation (Romans 9:4-5).

Moses told them, but they could not receive God’s words “because of their broken spirit” (Exodus 6:9). God did not hold it against them. He knows when we are overwhelmed with the burdens of this life. That does not mean that He will leave us where we are. God commanded Moses to go back to Pharaoh and order His people’s release. God renewed His promise to bring them out with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. They thought the battle was over but it was just beginning.

Depictions of the pharaohs on stone reliefs often show them with an outstretched arm holding a whip or a rod. These were meant to show the might of the pharaoh. God’s outstretched arm makes Pharaoh’s look like a dry twig. But still the people could not hear because of their broken spirit.

When we are in the middle of life’s difficulties, we need to remember that God does not give up on us. He has the power to redeem us even if we cannot hear or believe. Nothing is too hard for Him. Remember your own salvation! He has made you His own and no earthly power, or for that matter no spiritual power either, can stop His redeeming work in your life.

Consider: Are you praying for people who cannot hear because of their broken spirit or slavery to sin? It is not impossible for God to redeem them. God is at work with His mighty outstretched arm. They will see His power and have clear choices.

## 2/17 Exodus 7:5

*5 The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.*

God’s plagues on Egypt addressed many of Egypt’s gods. The plagues involved not just random afflictions, but things the Egyptians revered. God was not only delivering the Israelites, He was demonstrating to the Egyptians that their religion of many gods was in vain. God alone is to be worshiped. Many Egyptians did convert and leave with Moses; one even became Moses wife (Exodus 12:38; Numbers 12:1).

God is always at work in the world to show people they are worshiping false gods. One complaint against Christianity is that it is seen by some as “exclusive.” But at their roots, all religions have exclusive claims. The Bible teaches that all are made in the image of God and that God is reaching out to all the world. The widespread circulation of the Bible in most of the languages of the world is a confirmation of that truth. No other book comes close to being translated into so many languages.

God is also working in our own lives. Even though we have the Bible, we tend to let other gods claim our affections. Anything we put before the one true God becomes another god to us. God is faithful to do for us what He did for the Egyptians. He will show us that our gods are powerless in our time of need. Sometimes that comes in times of tragedy. Other times it happens when we are quiet and the Spirit of God convicts us of how our time is spent. All will know the He is the LORD. Then each must decide whether or not he or she will come out and serve the one true and living God.

Prayer: LORD, if I have put anything before You, forgive me. Teach me how unworthy and helpless those things are, and by contrast, how worthy You are to receive first place in my life.

## 2/18 Exodus 10:1-2

*1 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, 2and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD.”*

When the LORD warned Pharaoh of a coming plague, He would tell him that it would happen so that he would know that there is “none like me in all the earth”. (Exodus 8:10; 9:14) But here at the eighth plague, God is telling Moses that this is also for him and the people of Israel to be able to tell their children that the LORD is God. The plagues were for all to see that “the earth is the LORD’S” (Exodus 9:29).

God is always revealing Himself to mankind in one way or another. In our day we are seeing the wonders of creation, the intricate design in individual creatures, the wonders of the subatomic world, and the vastness of space. Everything is filled with beauty and order. Books have been written on the irreducible complexity in the functions of living organisms, meaning that they had to be designed by a Creator. Why? So that we may know that “the earth is the LORD’S”.

Each of us is also taught by the LORD in the details of our individual lives. We can’t explain the coincidences (God-incidences) that happen again and again to make us know our days are ordered by the invisible hand of God. We have the same options that Pharaoh and the people of Israel had. We can harden our hearts or we can believe and tell our children and grandchildren what God has done.

Consider: We soon forget the wonder of God orchestrating events in our lives. Wouldn’t it be better to put them in writing to share with our children and grandchildren to encourage their faith? Share not only the Bible stories but your own stories as well.

## 2/19 Exodus 13:15-16

*15 For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’16 It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes, for by a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt.”*

The last plague was the death of the firstborn males. Most Egyptians believed the Pharaoh and his son were gods. For the moment, Pharaoh was a broken man. He had to acknowledge that the LORD is the supreme God. It took the death of his son to get him to bow his knee. What will it take for the world to bow before the LORD?

Two things in this passage offend the unregenerate mind. First, how could God end the life of these children? God had warned Pharaoh from the beginning of his encounter with Moses that Israel was God’s firstborn. He told Pharaoh that if he would not let His firstborn go, God would kill Pharaoh’s firstborn (Exodus 4:23). God was extremely patient through nine miraculous plagues and Pharaoh’s continual hardness of heart. It is not as if Pharaoh wasn’t warned. If Pharaoh had not been so stubborn, his son and many sons in Egypt would not have died. The slaves were going to be freed. It was Pharaoh’s choices that determined that the Hebrew’s freedom would only come at the death of the firstborn.

The second thing that disturbs many is the sacrifice of the firstborn male animals to remind Israel of this great deliverance. One problem is that we forget that animals were made for man. The blood of the animal reminds us of the cost of that deliverance from slavery and the protection from the angel of death. It reminds us of the grace that is available to those who will enter into the home with the blood-stained door. It also causes us to look forward to the blood of the Lamb of God whose blood is upon the doorpost of our hearts so that we might be delivered from sin and the judgment we deserve. God so loved us and desired our freedom that He was willing for His Son to die for our deliverance. It took such a graphic reminder to show the severity of sin, the stubbornness of man’s heart, the grace of God, and His passion to set us free.

A mark on your hands and frontlets between your eyes means that the Word of God affects all that we do (hands). It means that when people look at us, they should see the effects of the deliverance in our lives (frontlets on the forehead).

Consider: Is the great price that Jesus paid for my freedom something that affects all that I do so that when people look at me they see a free man or woman?

## 2/20 Exodus 14:31

*31 Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.*

After the ten plagues on Egypt, their departure from Egypt loaded with treasure, and the pillar that led them to the sea, you would think the people would have total trust in the LORD and in His servant Moses. When they saw the army of Pharaoh coming for them they asked Moses if he had led them there because there wasn’t enough room for all their graves in Egypt. It wasn’t until they passed through the sea on dry ground and saw the army of Pharaoh drown that they really believed.

A psalmist wrote that it was then when the Hebrews finally believed, but he went on to say that they soon forgot God’s works and didn’t wait for His counsel (Psalm 106:13). Belief can be a temporary thing dependent on circumstances. Real faith does not require miracles. Jesus rebuked the people of His day when He told them that unless they saw signs and wonders they would not believe (John 4:48). He warned that in the Last Days there would be false prophets that showed signs and wonders (Mark 13:22). He also rebuked those who asked for a sign saying that it is a wicked and perverse people that seek a sign (Mark 16:4). So why are so many today in the church seeking signs and wonders?

Faith is an issue of the heart, not of the head. We can believe in our mind one minute and doubt the next. But when the heart is won over by the love of God, our hearts are captured and we believe from the heart even when we don’t understand our circumstances. We trust even as we are persecuted. This is the faith of the martyrs.

Prayer: LORD, please capture my heart with Your love. Help me to see the greatness of it, that my heart might fully trust in You alone.

**2/21 Exodus 15:26***26 saying, “If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, your healer.”*

It was only three days after the miraculous crossing of the sea that the Israelites began to complain about the lack of water. The water at the first well was bitter. God directed Moses to throw in a particular tree which made the water drinkable. Could this be a picture of the cross (tree) of Jesus making life in this world bearable?

In the very next sentence, God revealed another aspect of His nature to them. He told them that if they would listen to His voice, do what was right, heed the commandments and keep His statutes, that they would be free from the diseases they saw in Egypt. “I am *YHWH Rapha*”, God said. That means that He is the God that cures us. Just as the Lord showed them how to cure the water, He would cure their diseases as well.

The prophet Isaiah said it would be by His (the Messiah’s) stripes we would be healed, meaning the whip lashes He received in our place (Isaiah 53:5). Peter tells us that this means spiritual healing of our souls. *24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.* 1 Peter 2:24 The Holy Spirit showed Peter that what God said to Moses and the prophecy of Isaiah both looked forward to what Jesus would do for us. Certainly, God can heal physical illness should He choose to do so, but a much greater healing takes place in our souls. The Egyptians’ greatest affliction was their hard hearts. Only Jesus can heal us of a hard heart. But first we must come to Him by faith, listen to His voice, and obey.

Prayer: LORD Jesus, deliver me from a hard heart. Help me to listen to Your voice, and empower me to obey. Thank You for being the *YHWH Rapha*, the LORD that heals me.

## 2/22 Exodus 16:4

*4 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.*

Forty-five days into their journey out of Egypt, the people began complaining to Moses about the lack of food. They hadn’t realized that God was the provider. Once again they impugned Moses’ motives when they basically said, “Why did you bring us out here to starve us?” Instead of looking to God for His supply, they looked to Moses. God was ever so patiently teaching them as a nation to look to Him to supply all their needs. He was teaching them to listen to Him and obey Him with complete trust. That is in our best interest.

The test was to see if they would listen. It is one thing to hear and another to really listen. They heard Moses tell them to only gather enough for each day and on the sixth day to gather for two days and gather none on the seventh, but some did not listen to him. Just in case God lied about daily provision, they gathered extra, which rotted by the next morning. And on the seventh day, some people went out to gather it even though Moses specifically ordered them not to do so. It looks like they figured it was a natural phenomenon and ignored God’s instructions. That’s a common practice of man.

Jesus reminded His listeners of this account and declared that He is the true bread from heaven (John 6:31-33). To be in Him is the only way to walk in God’s law. This is our test today. Will we listen to Him? Will we partake of Him each day and take time to rest in Him as well. Or will we consider Him a natural person and try to use Him to meet our need but refuse to listen to Him?

Consider: God said to Jesus’ closest disciples, “This is my beloved Son; listen to Him!” (Mark 9:7)

## 2/23 Exodus 17:7

*7 And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”*

Once again the people were upset because there was no water. Once again they blamed Moses. They hadn’t learned the last lesson from the miracle of daily manna. It is the LORD that provides for our needs. This time they threw in a new twist. The asked if the LORD was really among them. They had seen and experienced the wonders God did in Egypt, crossed the sea, seen water transformed and quail and bread delivered to them in the wilderness. They had seen the glory of the LORD in the cloud that led them, and now do they dare to ask if God is really among them?

No wonder Moses called the place “Testing and Quarreling”. This account will come up a number of times in Scripture. What is it about man that he has so little faith? Even after God has shown us over and over that He is faithful, one little test comes along and we ask if He is really with us or not. His patience is amazing. In this account, the LORD had Moses strike a rock from which water came out in abundance.

To ask God to do your bidding to prove He is with you is to declare your doubt in His Word and downplay all the things He has done for you to this point in time. When tempted to test God and quarrel with His servants, instead pray with faith. Declare your trust in God’s faithfulness. Remind yourself of all the times in your past that He has been faithful. Then wait patiently for His direction.

Consider: How would you feel if your children constantly doubted your concern for them? What would you prefer they did instead? What could they say that would please your heart? Will you be an example for them by trusting God?

## 2/24 Exodus 18:18

*18 You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone.*

Moses was trying to be priest to the entire nation. The people stood in line all day to wait for Moses to listen to their case and hear from God. Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, saw this process and spoke the words in our verse for today. No one can carry such a load day after day regardless of how gifted they are. Not only does it wear on the person, but it is tiring for those waiting for their turn to be heard.

Jethro encouraged Moses to share the load by appointing others to help. He suggested Moses look for able and trustworthy men to be over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, to share the load. Then the people could get a quick hearing and fewer cases would go all the way to Moses.

Moses meant well. Until Jethro pointed out the solution, Moses could not see that God could anoint others to share the load. God loves to include us in His work in the world. We should be as inclusive in inviting others to participate in the things God has called us to do. Every leader needs to learn this lesson. Every follower needs to be aware of the potential for burnout in his or her leader. Perhaps you may be one of the in-between people that can lighten the load by overseeing a smaller group. We all have the potential of taking on too much and wearing out. Trusting the Lord often means trusting Him to anoint others to help. It will encourage their spiritual growth and show that you aren’t overconfident in yourself.

Consider: Am I wearing myself out? To have a long and fruitful ministry, you need to share the load of leadership with others. Are you trusting God to anoint them? What Jethro said to Moses is true for us all. “You are not able to do it alone.” We need to work together with the body of Christ. We should bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2).

## 2/25 Exodus 20:3

*3 “You shall have no other gods before me.*

The first of the Ten Commandments helps us obey all the rest. If the holy God of Israel, Creator of heaven and earth, is our God, then we will serve and obey Him alone. Disobedience to most of the other nine commandments comes from making light of this first one. That is one reason Jesus taught that the Great Command was to love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

The second commandment is to not bow to other gods. The third is to not take God’s name in vain. The fourth is to remember the Sabbath, a day of worship and rest. If the Living God is first in our heart, then of course we will keep all of these commands.

The fifth commandment is to honor your father and mother. The sixth is to not commit murder. The seventh is to not commit adultery. The eighth is to not steal. The ninth is to not lie about your neighbor. The tenth is to not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor. These are about our relationship with others. How do they relate to the first commandment?

If you put God first, you will recognize that He is the One that put you in a home with that particular father and mother. Honoring them honors God, even when they are less than perfect. You will not murder because man is made in the image of God. You will not commit adultery because it dishonors God’s design for human relationships and causes people to break their covenant with God. You will not steal because you see that God gave stewardship of that thing to a different person. You will not lie because God is truth. You will not covet because you will be content with God and what He provides for you. Jesus was giving us a profound insight when He told us that all the Law was fulfilled in the Great Command of loving God with your all, and your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-40).

Consider: Am I being tempted today in one of these areas? If so, how am I disregarding the first commandment? How should this insight change my attitude (Genesis 39:9b)?

## 2/26 Exodus 20:24b

*24b In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.*

In the middle of God’s law regarding altars, there is this profound promise. Where His name is remembered, He promises to come and bring a blessing. God revealed his name, *YHWH*, to Moses (Exodus 6:3). The sense of His name is the timeless, ever present God. The name of the LORD first dwelt in the tabernacle in Shiloh (Jeremiah 7:12). Later the name of the LORD would dwell in the temple in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 12:5, 11). This passage we are looking at does not say “where I cause my name to dwell,” but where it is “remembered”. In the context of the passage He caused His name to be remembered where sacrifice to the LORD took place such as at the tabernacle and the temple.

One of the clear teachings of the New Testament is that we, the redeemed of Jesus, are the temple of the living God (Ephesians 2:19-22). God causes His name to be remembered wherever you are, Christian. You bring the fragrance of Christ as you walk in the Spirit (2 Corinthians 2:14). You offer sacrifices of praise (Hebrews 13:15). You offer yourself as a living sacrifice each day (Romans 12:1).

If this is true of you, then the promise we see in the altar instructions is for you. He comes to you and blesses you. Of course it is because of the work of Jesus who atoned for your sins and intercedes for you at this moment. That, itself, is a blessing but just a part of the blessing of His presence.

Prayer: LORD, open my eyes to the blessings You bring as You cause Your name to be remembered in me. Help me live in gratitude and celebration of this truth today. Help me let go of the passing annoyances and cling to these rich things of real importance.

## 2/27 Exodus 23:15-16

*15 You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. 16 You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor.*

The LORD gave the nation of Israel laws for societal order, health, and worship. Jesus told us they all can be summed up in loving God with your all and your neighbor as yourself. When we look at the laws, we should be able to see the heart of God that gave them. In today’s text, the LORD commanded the people to come to three feasts every year. In addition to taking off one day in seven to rest and one year in seven as well, they were to take these weeklong religious celebrations.

Rest is essential to our wellbeing. Some cultures take rest to an extreme, while others ignore the need altogether. Japan had a culture of work that encouraged men to give themselves without rest. Men were dropping dead in their early fifties for no apparent reason. The doctors simply named it “sudden death”. These people worked themselves to death, ignoring God’s design for regular periods of rest. After doing studies on proficiency and finding more was accomplished when people rested, companies began demanding that their employees take vacation time.

We can see God’s gracious heart in commanding Israel to take time off to reflect and be refreshed. These worship gatherings were called feasts. They were to celebrate and enjoy life. Recognize your need for rest and find a balanced approach. Your body and spirit will tell you when it is time, but these guidelines that God gave His people are a good standard: one day in seven, and three weeks in a year. Don’t feel guilty about taking the rest you need.

Meditation: God loves us and gives us instructions for our wellbeing. His commands to us are for our good. He even cares that we get sufficient rest.

2/28 Exodus 24:11   
*11 And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.*

After the Moses read the commandments and the people agreed to obey, the covenant was sealed with blood. Then God invited the leaders of Israel to come up Mount Sinai and meet with Him. They feared this holy God would destroy them, but He did not lay a hand on them.

What did they see? God is a Spirit. Moses describes the clear sapphire they saw under God’s feet, but other than that there is no description. They must have seen the pre-incarnate Son of God who is the visible manifestation of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). You would think they would simply fall on their faces and worship Him. That is the response in many other passages of Scripture describing an encounter with God. But here it simply says they ate and drank. In the Hebrew culture, this was a way to conclude a covenant. To dine with another was a sign of being at peace with them. It was a time of joyful fellowship that a lifelong agreement had been reached.

We see this again at the end of the New Testament when Jesus comes to the church of Laodicea (Revelation 3:20). He has concluded a covenant of blood with them as well, one made in His own blood on the cross. But this time, He comes down to them and knocks on their door. They had taken lightly the importance of this wonderful covenant and not concluded it with fellowship with God. He promises to come in and dine with them if they will only open the door.

The first account with Moses took place in fear and trembling as the mountain shook and burned. The people agreed to the covenant of the Law. The second account with the church in Laodicea speaks of the apathy of some people in response to the wonderful covenant of grace. In both accounts God is graciously willing to fellowship with man (Song of Songs 5:2-6). In the first God invites them to come up to Him. In the second, God comes down to us in our waywardness and asks for the opportunity to renew our passion. No other faith presents such a gracious God!

Consider: How are you responding to such a gracious invitation?

March

## 3/1 Exodus 25:8

*8 And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.*

God has always planned to be in our midst, but it has to come about through a proper relationship to truly be all He means it to be. The tree of life was in the midst of the Garden. The tabernacle was in the midst of the tribes of Israel. Wherever two or three are gathered in Jesus’ name (Matthew 18:20), He promised to be in their midst. But let us go one step further. Jesus promised that if we love Him and keep His word, He and the Father would make their home in us (John 14:23)!

Do you see a pattern from the macro to the micro? We see it in creation too. The heavens declare His glory (Psalm 19:1). The earth is full of His glory (Isaiah 6:3). The church reveals His glory. (Ephesians 3:21) And you and I should be filled with His glory because of His presence in our midst. His presence in us can only be possible if we are made holy. His holiness will not tolerate evil in our heart. The tabernacle is a picture of how that problem can be overcome.

All the illustrations in the tabernacle of Moses are to help us understand that God wants to be with us and in us, but we must be holy. Every piece of furniture and every ritual teach that God will provide a way for that to be possible. It all points wonderfully to Jesus, to justice, to mercy and love. God wants us to understand His heart. The tabernacle is His illustration of what He had planned so that we could grasp the need for Jesus to be our atoning sacrifice. And the end result is God making us His dwelling place, His home, forever.

Consider: How gracious of God to take us by the hand and show us picture after picture, so that when Jesus came we would understand why He had to die for us. Look deeply into God’s illustrations to understand what God has done for us.

## 3/2 Exodus 30:6

*6 And you shall put it in front of the veil that is above the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is above the testimony, where I will meet with you.*

In the tabernacle there was a small altar for incense. It stood right in front of the curtain to the Holy of Holies where God dwelt over the lid of the ark of the testimony, also called the mercy seat. Every morning and every evening, the priest was to burn incense on it, so that the smoke of the incense went up continually before the LORD. It was there that God would speak to the priest and answer the questions he brought from the people to the LORD.

This altar and its incense are a picture of prayer. Incense was to be added in the morning and evening with the effect continuing all day and night. We can see in this the dedicated servant of God coming before Him with earnest prayer for himself and others. Though he does not remain in this special place all day, the prayer comes up before the LORD all day and night as he carries the requests in his heart. This is where God meets with us. He meets us when we come to pray.

Before the priest has entered into this sacred place, he has carefully washed himself and put on his special robe. This is a picture of us first confessing our sins and getting right before God. Then we can offer that incense of intercession and know God will meet with us. Since Jesus died for us, the veil that separated the priest from the glorious but frightening presence of God has been torn open. We no longer need to fear when we come before Him in prayer as we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ (Psalm 84:9).

Consider: Am I following through on this pattern the LORD has shown, meeting with the LORD twice daily and letting the incense on prayer rise day and night (1Thessalonians 5:17)?

## 3/3 Exodus 30:32

*32 It shall not be poured on the body of an ordinary person, and you shall make no other like it in composition. It is holy, and it shall be holy to you.*

God directed the ingredients for compounding the anointing oil which was to be used to anoint the priests, the tabernacle, its furniture, and the sacred instruments. It was not to be used for ordinary people as perfume. It was never to be used for any other purpose and the people were never to make something similar.

In the same chapter, God directed the ingredients for compounding the incense that was to burn on the altar of incense (see yesterday’s devotion). The same warning was given to not use it for any other purpose and for people to never make an imitation for their own use.

The oil is a picture of the Holy Spirit. The incense is a picture of prayer that should always be led by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is not ours to use as we wish. The warning is applicable today to those who would use the Holy Spirit to promote their name and ministry. He (the Holy Spirit) promotes Jesus and points us to Him, not to a man. Some act as if the Holy Spirit is serving them. That is exactly what God was warning against in this passage.

The same is true for prayer. James warned that we do not receive what we pray for because we are asking for things we are lusting after (James 4:3). Prayer is not to serve you. Certainly we are encouraged to pray for our needs (Matthew 7:11), however, our prayers should be directed by the Holy Spirit and not seen as a way to have God serve us and our whims (Romans 8:26-27). The Spirit and true prayer are holy. That means they are set apart for God’s use, not ours to do with as we please (Acts 8:17-23). Those who make imitation oil or incense were to be expelled from God’s people (Exodus 30:33). It’s quite a warning!

Prayer: LORD, purify my heart and open my ears that my prayers may be directed by Your Holy Spirit. Help me never to see Him as my servant, but myself as His.

## 3/4 Exodus 33:9

*9 When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses.*

Before God gave the instructions for the Tabernacle, Moses set up a special tent outside the camp that he called the Tent of Meeting. Those who wanted to seek the LORD would go out to the tent to pray. But when Moses went to the tent, the pillar of cloud that was leading them through the wilderness and shading them from the sun would move over the tent. When this would take place, the rest of the people would stand at the entrance of their tents and worship. Though everyone could pray, Moses was God’s designated priest and mouthpiece to the nation. God wanted to make the Israelites a nation of priests to the world, but they continually rebelled and complained against God.

Today we still have special places to meet with God. Sometimes it is a church, a prayer room, the spot where you sit early each morning to read your Bible. Perhaps you are there right now as you read this. Though there is no pillar of cloud over your location, you are meeting with the Eternal God of Israel. Because of what Jesus has done for you in becoming your righteousness, God is pleased to meet with you as He was with Moses (Hebrews 4:16).

Perhaps it would help you to enter into a personal time of fellowship if you used your sanctified imagination to see the cloud come over your tent of meeting. The Bible calls our bodies a tent (2 Corinthians 5:1). Wherever you meet the LORD in prayer is where the cloud will come and hover over you. He will speak to you in His still, small voice, and through His Word. Come with expectation and take time to be silent and listen. You can be sure that when Moses brought his burdens, he listened for God’s answers.

Prayer: LORD, may these times of meeting with You never be routine. Help me to always see the honor and blessing of coming before You clothed in Jesus. Help me to always come with expectation and reverence.

## 3/5 Exodus 33:14

*14 And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”*

This verse was in the previous devotional book, *Through the Bible Daily Devotional,* but with a different emphasis. This time through, I want to emphasize God’s ability to give us rest. To Moses, it surely meant freedom from slave drivers and enemies. It meant entering the Promised Land and having sufficient resources, but in the New Testament we’ll find it means much more (Hebrews 4:9-11).

The rest of God’s presence in our life is to know His goodness. We see it manifested in Jesus and experience it each day through the Holy Spirit. It is trusting God in all things. It is trusting Jesus’ finished work on the cross. It is experiencing resurrection power. It is living in Christ. It is to cease worrying and to cast all your anxieties on the LORD. It is to know you are living in love that is all-powerful. It is full surrender. It is leaving every worry at the throne of God and experiencing His peace. It is living in the joy of Jesus.

When God speaks as He did to Moses, there is the practical meaning that is plain and easily understood. There is also a richer, deeper meaning that we come to understand through reading His word and living it out. When Jesus said, “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28), He was speaking of this deeper meaning.

Consider: Am I living in this rest? If not, what needs to change in me?

## 3/6 Exodus 34:6-7

*6 The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”*

This is the LORD’S self-description to Moses. Moses had gone back up Sinai for another miraculous forty days without food or water. The LORD descended in the pillar of cloud and described Himself with these words. LORD is our translation of the four letters in Hebrew “YHWH,” meaning “the eternal One.”

“Merciful” is to not give others what they deserve. “Gracious” is to give out of the goodness of one’s heart regardless of the attitude or actions of the recipient. This was so unlike the gods that the nations worshiped. They saw their gods as vengeful and always seeking to be pleased by gifts. They would plead for mercy and grace from these gods but only expected it because of gifts, not from the goodness or graciousness in the god’s heart.

“Abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” is the description of God we see most often throughout the old covenant. The kings, prophets, and psalmists would often plead to God on the basis of these character qualities. They would attribute good things in their lives to these attributes.

Forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin shows us God wants to forgive. If we will simply confess our sins and turn from them, He has provided a way in Christ Jesus that we can be forgiven. But if we will not, He cannot simply look the other way or He would be evil. A judge that lets the wrongdoer go free without punishment is complicit in the evil. The evil a man commits will affect future generations.

This description is one of the perfect, eternal, creator of all that is. We should acknowledge these attributes of His when we see them expressed toward us in our lives. Thank Him for His mercy and grace. Plead with Him according to His steadfast love and faithfulness. Notice the way these are expressed toward you. Thank Him for His willingness to forgive your sins and for making that possible through Jesus. Keep the fear of His justice always before you.

Prayer: Thank you LORD for your perfect character. Help me to express Your mercy, grace, steadfast love, faithfulness, and forgiveness to all whom I meet.

## 3/7 Exodus 36:5

*5 and said to Moses, “The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the LORD has commanded us to do.”*

God gave Moses a detailed description of all that would go into making the tabernacle for worship. The people whose hearts moved them to give were to bring a freewill offering of the different materials that would be needed. Much of the material was “borrowed” from the Egyptians when they left Egypt, so they were really giving back to God what they had recently been given (Exodus 12:36). It was their wages for their years of labor.

Through much of their wilderness wandering they showed themselves to be a hard-hearted people, but in this offering they show their better side. They gave so much that the workmen asked Moses to tell them to stop bringing materials. They were generous with their newly-acquired wealth.

Generosity comes from a heart that is stirred by the LORD. A heart that knows God is the great provider and can be free to give without concern for future needs. They experience the joy of giving. Jesus said that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). That is so contrary to our natural self. All giving is really just passing on what we have received (1 Corinthians 4:7). We are caretakers of goods for our short time here on earth. God gives things to us to meet our needs but also for the needs of others that we might experience His joy of giving and be blessed in the process.

Consider: Have you found that your needs are met by God so that you can freely give when your heart is moved by a need? Have you experienced the blessing of giving? Do you see a need today that God has given you the resources to meet?

## 3/8 Exodus 40:38

*38 For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.*

This is the last verse in the book of Exodus. The tabernacle was completed. God would continue to be with them, but separated from them by the veils of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle would be in the middle of the camp so that their worship place would be most accessible to all. When it was erected, the glory of the LORD filled it to the extent that Moses was unable to enter. Adding to this powerful visible effect was the presence of the pillar of cloud that led them and settled on the Tabernacle whenever they camped. At night it became a pillar of fire, lighting up the Tabernacle.

We sometimes wish we could see such powerful images to help our faith. But the essence of faith is believing when you can’t see (Hebrews 11:1). If seeing really helped our faith, the older generation of Israelites would not have died in the wilderness. Seeing may encourage us for a time, but it is faith that endures the test of time.

The lesson we should learn from the pillar of cloud is to let God lead. When the pillar lifted from the Tabernacle, trumpets were blown to announce that it was time to break camp. When the pillar of cloud stopped, they set up camp again. Sometimes they were in one spot for a few days, and other times for months. They didn’t follow a pattern or conditions. They followed the LORD in the cloud.

Today we have the LORD’S presence in the Holy Spirit. He tells us when to move and when to settle down. If we rely on physical signs, we will not develop a sensitivity to the Spirit. We are actually more blessed than the Israelites, for God is leading each of us individually in personal way and as a body of believers. The trumpet we hear is the Word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Consider: Am I letting the Holy Spirit lead my life like the cloud led the Israelites?

## 3/9 Leviticus 2:1

*1 “When anyone brings a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour. He shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it*

We have seen that God instructed man to use animal sacrifice because of the need to see the seriousness of sin and its consequences. God gave Moses specific instructions for daily animal sacrifice in the Tabernacle. Moses was also given instruction for grain offerings. If we see the seriousness of sin in the shedding of blood, what can a grain offering show us?

In that age, covenants between tribes were concluded with a meal that included salted bread. Salt was a preserving agent and pictured the enduring quality of the covenant. The fact that it was consumed at a meal together pictured fellowship. The grain offering in the Tabernacle included salt (Leviticus 2:13), oil, and frankincense. The oil would help it to burn, but was also a picture of the Holy Spirit who is involved in all our worship. The frankincense gave it a fragrant odor and was symbolic of prayer.

The essence of the grain offering then is that the worshiper, as an Israelite, remembered their eternal covenant with God. But let us go deeper to the ultimate meaning. The grain had to be bruised and crushed to turn it into fine flour. Jesus called Himself the bread of life. He was bruised and crushed for us, full of the Holy Spirit, and intercedes for us in prayer. He is the ultimate grain offering who brings us into eternal fellowship with God.

He is received by the Father, but also ours to partake. The priest of the Tabernacle ate all of the offering that was not consumed, and so we as priests of the New Covenant partake of Jesus, the bread of life. Each time we receive communion we should remember the grain offering and its fulfillment in Jesus.

Remember: Jesus is forever your bread of life, filled with the Holy Spirit, lifting up prayer on your behalf.

## 3/10 Leviticus 6:5-6

*5 or anything about which he has sworn falsely, he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs on the day he realizes his guilt. 6 And he shall bring to the priest as his compensation to the LORD a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent for a guilt offering.*

Leviticus is a book of laws regarding worship and social order. The law we will look at today deals with theft. If someone took a deposit, or safeguarded something for someone, or found something that belonged to someone else, or simply stole something and then lied about it so that they would gain financially, there was a law about how they should compensate the injured party. The person in the wrong may have been found out, or they may have decided to make the compensation because they realized their guilt. It seems the law expected people’s conscience to bother them. Perhaps they might realize God was not blessing them because of sin.

The compensation first went to the person that incurred the loss. It was to be 120 percent of what was taken. The person had lost the use of the object for a time and was compensated for that as well. But that is not the end of the matter. The thief must also make things right with God. To be unjust toward man is to offend God. This is why Joseph told Potiphar’s wife that he could not sin against his master and God (Genesis 39:9).

A sacrifice of a ram was also required. The seriousness to God of the sin against another human being had to be acknowledged. The ram may have been more costly than the object that was stolen. He could have stolen a little or a lot but the sacrifice was the same. Blood showed him how serious his crime was before the LORD and looked forward to the Savior. The person whom the thief deprived was made in the image of God. God is the one that gave that person the stewardship over that possession. God is offended when we are unjust toward one another. This is the moral basis for private property and punishing theft. Without these basic truths, there is no reason for private property or to call theft a crime.

Consider: God is offended when we injure others in any way. We must make things right with the person, but also with God. Do you need to compensate someone and get right with God?

## 3/11 Leviticus 9:24

*24 And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.*

The presence of the LORD was in the Holy of Holies behind two veils. The first veil divided the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The second was the entrance to the Tabernacle. It separated the area in which the people came to bring their sacrifices and the area within the covered tent where the priests ministered to the LORD. The fire came out from the innermost sanctum of that covered tent, through the two curtains, to the altar. Apparently it did not consume the veils, but passed through them without harming them while consuming what was placed on the altar.

All the people had gathered to see the conclusion of the ordination of Aaron and his sons. They had completed seven days before the tent of meeting and the required sacrifices. They had been anointed with oil and blood of the sacrifice. When everything was completed and the final sacrifice placed on the altar, then the fire came out to confirm that God accepted all that was done according to His direction. At that moment, the people had no doubt that God had ordained Aaron and his sons to serve as priests. The appropriate fear of the LORD and respect for the priests were in their hearts, though some would soon forget.

What is the sign today that a person has been ordained to be priest of the LORD? The New Testament has every believer in the role of priest. We have been anointed with the blood of our sacrifice, Jesus, and the oil of the Holy Spirit. Our lives are living sacrifices, dedicated to His service. The fire of God is the passion in our souls to know Him and let Him live in and through us. When others see that fire, they are drawn to revere the LORD and hear the Word God delivered to them through us.

Consider: Am I willing to let the fire of God consume me so that my thoughts and actions reveal Jesus in me?

## 3/12 Leviticus 10:1-2

*1 Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. 2 And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.*

The previous chapter gives a lengthy account of the ordination process of these men. They knew what God required. They had seen His glory on Mount Sinai. They saw the fire come out from the presence of the LORD and consume the offering. They witnessed God’s glory fill the Tabernacle. They were instructed to use the fire from the altar that was originally ignited by God. They intentionally disobeyed and made an offering their own way, using fire from another source in their censer with incense.

It seems like such a small thing, but everything God had instructed was a picture of spiritual realities. By intentionally disobeying God, they were distorting the symbolism. They knew better. God kept faithful to the picture He was painting by judging them with death.

Fire symbolizes the zeal and purity of God. By using the fire from another source, the message was distorted to say that man’s way and man’s zeal are good enough for God. It was the opposite of God’s message. Moses delivered God’s words to their father, Aaron, “Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified” (Leviticus 10:3). The people who minister to the LORD and His people are to be holy. The glory of God cannot be marred by the behavior of the minister without severe consequences. This is why we see so many fallen ministers judged so severely. Unauthorized fire is common in the church. God’s Word is replaced by man’s ideas and philosophy. God is just in dealing with the minister severely because their distortion of the truth harms the people of God.

Consider: The fear of God is a healthy thing to keep us from error. Pray for those who minister the Word of God to you, that they may walk in the ways of the LORD and be careful not to distort His revelation.

## 3/13 Leviticus 11:45

*45 For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.*

God wanted His people, the Israelites, to be set apart. That is the meaning of the word “holy.” He wanted to distinguish them from the other nations, for He was revealing Himself to the world through their prophets. This command came at the end of the list of foods that they were allowed to eat. Certain animals and sea creatures and insects were to be unclean to them.

Today we know some of the problems that come from some of these foods. They were not to eat the fat of the sacrifices. Now we know it increases our cholesterol levels. They were not to eat pork. Wild pork often can carry the roundworm that causes trichinosis. Asian islanders have a high rate of stomach cancer that may be connected to shell fish. All of these foods were forbidden to the Israelites for their good.

The Israelites did not understand that obeying God was not merely to set them apart but also for their health. The fact that they were a healthy people with a long life span was a sign of blessing that witnessed to the nations around them. God’s people today don’t necessarily need to follow the same food restrictions, but we should take care of our bodies as a part of our witness. The Apostle Paul tells us that our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 6:19). That is why we should not abuse them by over indulging in any food or drink. Your testimony is not just in what you say and preach, but in how you live your life.

Just as God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, He brings us out of the world system. Peter quotes this passage to remind us to be self-controlled (1Peter 1:13-16). He relates this to not living in the passions that once controlled us, but to have conduct that is consistent with our new life.

Consider: What does my daily life and care of my body say to others?

## 3/14 Leviticus 16:8

*8 And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel.*

Once a year, the people of Israel celebrated the Day of Atonement. The priest would offer a sacrifice for his own sins first. Then he would take two goats and cast lots to see which goat was the sacrifice and which went to Azazel. We don’t know the meaning of “Azazel.” It could mean a place in the wilderness or some dark spiritual power. Traditionally it was translated “scapegoat.”

The priest would place his hands on the head of the scapegoat and pronounce the sins of Israel and then someone would take it out into the wilderness and release it. The other ram was sacrificed and the blood was sprinkled before the mercy seat. We wonder why two rams were necessary to represent atonement.

Of course they both look forward to Jesus’ atoning sacrifice for us on the cross. He is the sacrifice for our sins. The blood of the goat represented the penalty for sin, and then the carcass was burned outside the camp, just as Jesus was crucified outside the city. The scapegoat is a picture of our sins being removed from us. Not only are we forgiven, but we are not to return to the habits and actions of sin. Those things should be driven from us. Forgiveness is one thing, but a new life free from the habitual sin is another. That is why we needed the picture of the two rams to understand all that atonement was to mean to us.

Sometimes people come to Jesus and want their sins to be forgiven by His blood, but they don’t send their sinful ways away from them. They have missed half the picture. The two go together.

Prayer: Thank you LORD for providing a means for the forgiveness of my sin and for the power to transform the way I think and act.

## 3/15 Leviticus 18:22

*22 You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.*

The LORD prohibited certain sexual relations. A man was not to have sexual relations with a near relative, or with men, or with animals. Just as food prohibitions were given for the health of the nation, so these sexual prohibitions were for the sake of health. That which is contrary to God’s design brings negative consequences.

A pregnancy from a closely-related couple is likely to compound genetic defects. Some of our sexually-transmitted diseases came from men having sex with animals. Syphilis originated in sheep.

Homosexuality has consequences as well. Studies have shown there is an increased risk of several types of cancer, physical damage to the body, and increased psychological problems. We don’t hear about these problems because it is becoming increasingly unpopular to take a biblical stand on any sexual issue. Those who do so are labeled bigots. When we see the consequences, we see God’s heart in prohibiting these actions. That should be our heart as well, concern for the individual’s well-being. We hate the sin but love the sinner. The reason we hate the sin is because it harms the sinner.

It is hypocritical of believers to rail against homosexuality, but to ignore a much more common sexual sin, adultery. It has consequences as well. It is equally forbidden. If we find ourselves ranting against a particular sin, we should ask ourselves if our reason is the same as God’s condemnation of that sin, which is concern for the person.

Admonition: The Apostle Paul tells us to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Let us make sure that when we speak against any sin in our society we do so with the heart of God.

## 3/16 Leviticus 19:32

*32 “You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.*

Advanced cultures tend to dismiss the elderly and even dishonor them. As societies become increasingly affluent selfishness tends to reign over wisdom. Youth and physical perfection are worshiped as the ultimate goal in these cultures. Look at the newsstands and notice the beautiful young faces and perfect bodies. The few magazines aimed at the elderly are often those with financial or political goals rather than honoring their wisdom and years of service.

Those who have truly walked with the LORD, both men and women, have a wealth of wisdom and experience from which we should be drawing. If you are one of the gray heads mentioned in this verse, seek out younger people that are eager to learn from your experience. If you are still the face of youth, seek out a godly elderly person of your gender that is willing to take the time to share with you. Listen for pearls of wisdom. Ask the elderly what books shaped their lives. Ask about their favorite verses of Scripture. Draw from their deep well of experience. In doing so, you will honor them and give their later years meaning and purpose while being blessed in the process.

God told Moses we should honor the elderly out of the fear of God. These elderly servants of God are the friends of God. We dismiss them to our own peril. I believe this verse is suggesting that we will face God’s discipline if we ignore them. We will all walk in their shoes one day. How do you want to be treated then?

Admonition: Honor the elderly among you with respect and time, especially those who have lived a life of faithful service to God. Carefully consider any advice they give.

## 3/17 Leviticus 19:16

*16 You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD.*

Perhaps one of our most frequently exercised faults is slander. We speak it about the other driver in traffic, about the singer at church, the neighbor down the block, and the relative we don’t particularly like. It spills out of us so readily that we should wonder what is wrong with us.

The problem is our sinful nature. We are quick to condemn others but slow to see the same fault in ourselves. In fact, it is often true that what annoys us about others is what we don’t like about our own tendencies. Slander elevates us above others in our own minds, but we may be just fooling ourselves (Proverbs 10:18).

God forbids slander because it is not helpful to us and can cause unnecessary pain and sorrow to others. It separates friends (Proverbs 16:28). It is judging others when it is not our place to do so (Matthew 7:1). It is usually an expression of pride and hardness of heart. We want to rebuke others for their selfishness because of our own selfishness. Can someone say “Hypocrite”? When we see someone doing what appears to be offensive to us, it should prompt us to pray for them. How much more helpful that would be than slander!

An Exercise: Watch how often you are tempted to slander someone. Look into your own heart and see the reason you want to do so. Think about how you should pray for the person and yourself instead.

## 3/18 Leviticus 22:21

*21 And when anyone offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering from the herd or from the flock, to be accepted it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it.*

When an Israelite brought an offering to the LORD, it had to be perfect, without any blemishes. You couldn’t take the sick or injured animal from your flock that was worthless to you. It reminds me of some of the things donated to churches. When a family buys a new thing to replace an old worn out thing, they offer the worn out thing to the church. It saves them a trip to the landfill.

God doesn’t want our leftovers. He is worthy of our very best. He has given His best to us in giving us His Son. To give Him anything less than our best is insulting. Think of it this way; if someone gave you a week of their time to help you in a time of need, would you thank them with a hotdog lunch? The thanks we give should represent how grateful our heart is. If we give some inexpensive leftover, we are merely showing how little we appreciate their sacrifice.

God had redeemed the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt, saved them from their enemies, given rules to help them have order and health, and provided their food every day. Hasn’t He done the same for us spiritually, which is even more important? What are you giving that shows your gratitude? For many of us, time is our most valuable commodity. Whatever our gift is, it reveals the level of gratitude in our heart.

Consider: When was the last time you gave out of gratitude to God? What did it reveal about your heart? Ponder how gracious God has been to you.

## 3/19 Leviticus 23:3

*3 “Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwelling places.*

The twenty third chapter of Leviticus outlines all the days of rest and the feast days. Apparently, God delights in us taking times of rest. Every week it was required that they rest one day. During the year they had week long celebrations including Passover and the Feast of Booths. There were also other special days of rest and worship.

In addition to those, the twenty fifth chapter describes a year of rest every seven years, and an extra year of rest every fifty years. It was called the Year of Jubilee. God anticipated the question of how they were supposed to survive without planting and harvesting. He promised that if they would keep His laws, He would provide enough on the sixth year to live on for three years. That would cover the year of rest and the year of jubilee, and the year that crops were planted until the harvest was reaped.

Unfortunately, the Israelites didn’t have the faith to practice those years of rest, but consider how productive that could have been. It was a break from the normal to rest, care for equipment, renew acquaintances, and reevaluate how you were living. It turns out that we are more productive when we take seasons of rest. Of course God knows that. It is how He designed us. He set the example for us in the creation account.

Do you consider rest as important and necessary as work? The workaholic is often hiding from something else in life. Time with the Lord in worship is essential to our well-being. Jesus declared that if we come to Him, we will find rest for our souls. Is your soul finding its rest in Him?

Consider: If you want to be a healthy person, you need both spiritual and physical rest. If you don’t schedule those times, the busyness of life will usually keep you from them. God had Israel put it on their calendar. Will you do the same?

## 3/20 Numbers 9:14

*14 And if a stranger sojourns among you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, according to the statute of the Passover and according to its rule, so shall he do. You shall have one statute, both for the sojourner and for the native.”*

When Israel was in Egypt during the final plague, any Egyptian who feared the LORD could have also marked their doors with the blood of a lamb and escaped the angel of death. When Israel celebrated Passover, any foreigners that were among them could also participate with them in the celebration and eating the lamb. Though God had made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants, foreigners could worship the LORD and even take part in these special celebrations. The laws for Israel applied to the sojourner as well (Numbers 15:15-16).

The blood on the door-posts was a picture of the cross of Jesus, the Lamb of God. Whoever enters in and partakes of Him is saved from the second death. Salvation is for all who will enter into Jesus and trust Him. When it comes to salvation, there is no difference between Jew and any other nationality. All are invited to enter in to Jesus. God so loved the world, not just Israel, that He gave His only Son, that whosoever, regardless of nationality or ethnicity, shall not perish but have everlasting life.

God’s plan of salvation has never changed. It has always been for all mankind. Christianity is derided as being exclusive when in reality it is probably the most inclusive of any religion. It is wonderfully rich in depth and mystery, yet simple enough for a child to understand. Jesus took the punishment for all that we have done wrong so that we can be with God forever.

Consider: Christianity is based on what God did for us. All other religions are based on works we must do. Which faith is most inclusive and available to all?

## 3/21 Numbers 11:11

*11 Moses said to the LORD, “Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all these people on me?*

Moses was wearing down. The repeated complaining of the people was getting to him. In spite of all the miracles, in spite of the discipline from God, they just kept coming to Moses with one complaint after another. He was at the breaking point. God’s answer was to give Moses 70 likeminded assistants.

The whining comes from focusing on personal desire instead of all that God was doing. They had miraculously been set free from Egypt, seen their enemies drown, been led daily by a cloud that shaded them from the sun, and fed daily from the hand of God, but they craved other things. If we are seeking satisfaction from the world, we will always be craving more. The world wasn’t meant to fully satisfy us. It won’t matter how many miracles we see, if our heart is fixed on physical things, we’ll never see the wonder of the only true God that satisfies the soul.

God anointed men with the same Spirit that was upon Moses because there needed to be people in the congregation that pointed people to God. Helping Moses carry the burden meant helping people shift their focus from our insatiable flesh, to the wonder of God in their midst. The need is the same today. This focus on the world to satisfy is the source of church battles and backsliding believers. The Spirit is available today to all who would take up this call to first personally focus on the LORD in our midst and the wonders He is doing, and then help others to shift their focus away from their craving for things of this world to God’s wonders and all-sufficiency.

Consider: The high rate of pastors quitting the ministry is largely due to the same problem. Will you be like one of the 70 by receiving the Spirit and focusing on God instead of the desires of this world? Will you help your pastor endure by pointing the people to the wonder of God in our midst?

## 3/22 Numbers 14:8-9

*8 If the LORD delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. 9 Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.”*

Moses sent a spy from each of the 12 tribes to investigate the Promised Land. They came back saying it was a land of milk and honey, which means a land of pastures for animals and fields for farming. It had terraced fields already in place. But ten of the spies said they should give up any hope of conquering it because of the giant people that lived there and the walled cities. Immediately the people gave up the hope of God fulfilling His promises to Abraham. They talked of choosing a leader to go back to Egypt.

Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, spoke our passage for today. They were men of faith. They were the kind of men that could see the hand of God and applied what they knew of God in the past to their present circumstance. They spoke of God’s ability and warned against rebelling against God. After all, they had seen what happened to Pharaoh’s army when he rebelled against the Lord. They had witnessed God’s wrath on their own people that rebelled.

These two men presented the people with two options: obediently go forward in faith and continue under the blessing of God to receive the Promised Land, or rebel and face His wrath. Fear of the Canaanites and stubbornness of heart motivated the people to attempt to stone Joshua and Caleb. God appeared in the cloud and stopped them from doing so, and announced His sentence on their rebellion. The older generation would die in the wilderness, and the young generation would go in later.

Consider: We are often presented with the same choice. God has good things planned for us if we will believe Him and not fear. But if we rebel, we will face the consequences of our rebellion. Consider what God has done in the past, where He is presently leading, and go forward with faith in His presence with us.

## 3/23 Numbers 15:13

*13 Every native Israelite shall do these things in this way, in offering a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.*

The Israelites were to make several kinds of offerings to the LORD. One was the meal or food offering. To offer food to someone was a sign of friendship and fellowship. Remember that the people in Eastern cultures think in pictures or illustrations. That was why Jesus used parables. All of the offerings spoke of something of our relationship with God that was fulfilled in Jesus.

This offering was made of fine flour. To make fine flour, one had to break and crush the grain. The additional ingredients were oil, frankincense and salt. No yeast or honey was to be added to this flat bread. A portion of it was offered on the altar, and the priests were to consume the rest. Because the bread was to be offered to the LORD, it was holy.

Jesus was the fulfillment of this offering in that He was broken and crushed for us (Isaiah 53:5). Oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ life was certainly saturated with the Spirit. Frankincense speaks of prayer. He was always in prayer with the Father and even now lives to intercede for us. Salt speaks of the enduring quality of the covenant God makes with us. It preserves and keeps it from decaying. Those who ate salted bread together were entering into a covenant of friendship.

Jesus said He is the bread of life. He offered Himself in complete obedience to the Father, but what was not consumed on the altar of God’s will is offered to us. He tells us that if we eat the heavenly bread we will never die (John 6:51). That is because by taking in Jesus, the Holy One, we enter into a friendship covenant with God. Jesus becomes our atoning sacrifice. Our sins are covered and the work of perfecting us for heaven has begun. This is the same reason that Jesus invited the wayward church of Laodicea to let Him in so that He might dine with them. (Revelation 3:20) The meal is the meal offering, Jesus, the pleasing aroma to the LORD.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus, for giving Yourself so that I might live. Help me to never take this heavenly bread for granted, or let a day go by without my meal of You, the Word made flesh, the Bread of Life.

**3/24 Numbers 15:39**

*39 And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after.*

How many times have you heard someone say, “Let your heart lead you”? If your heart is to do the will of God, that can be a good thing (2Samuel 7:3). But in most cases our heart is what gets us in trouble. We are born with a propensity toward evil. Our eyes, like Eve’s, cause us to lust after the forbidden (Genesis 3:6). That was why the Lord had the Israelites take the threads of their clothing and end it in a tassel. Orthodox Jews would make the tassel of 613 threads and tie them with five knots. Each thread was for an Old Testament law and each knot for a book of the Torah. This was the “fringe of His garment” that the woman with an issue of blood touched (Matthew 9:20).

The physical reminder was given to keep their hearts in the right place. The LORD used an illustrative term “inclined to whore after,” to describe our hearts. We fall in love, or perhaps “lust” is a better word, with forbidden things. God’s word tells us what is safe and wholesome and that is why we need reminders. They can steer our hearts and minds back in the right direction.

This is one function of the Holy Spirit in our lives today. He gently speaks to our hearts when they “whore after” things that are forbidden. We don’t have the tassels today, but we should have other reminders that are constantly with us. Some carry a Bible or have Scripture handy as an electronic device app. Others wear some kind of symbol such as a cross or a fish. Better still, a routine of Bible reading, memorization, prayer and fellowship will guard our hearts. Do you have a reminder to keep your heart in check?

Consider: Even a new creation in Christ needs continual reminders to keep our hearts and minds in the Spirit. Are your reminders working for you, or do you need to add some additional ones?

**3/25 Numbers 16:3**

*3 They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?”*

A man named Dathan inspired the Levites that cared for the Tabernacle to demand the authority to serve as priests, entering into the Tabernacle and serving where only Aaron and his sons were allowed to minister. They thought it was unfair that Moses and his brother Aaron were leaders in everything. If you recall, it was God who chose Moses and Aaron. Moses never wanted the job. That is true of godly men. It is only the power hungry who lust after leadership. Every time I have found a godly elder, they have always said they were not worthy of the position. Be careful of those who demand it.

Moses told the rebels to bring censers before the Tabernacle and let God choose. Once they arrived, the Lord told Moses that He was going to wipe them out, but Moses interceded in prayer pleading that they had been led astray. God directed them to go to the tents of the leaders of the rebellion, Dathan and two other families who refused to come to the Tabernacle. He warned everyone to get away from those tents. The earth opened up and swallowed them. Then fire came down and killed the 250 men that had come with censers.

Then next day the people complained that Moses had killed those people. I know, it is hard to believe, but I have seen people blame their pastor for the judgments that God dealt out on rebellious people in the church. People that are not led by the Spirit have a difficult time discerning the hand of the Lord. A plague began in the congregation of Israel. Moses interceded in prayer again. This time the Lord had Moses send Aaron out in their midst with a censer of incense between the dead and the living and the plague was stopped.

Lesson: Godly leaders do not relish their role. Ungodly leader types can be powerfully persuasive in influencing others against God’s leaders. Watch out for those who cause division. Genuine humility and concern for the people are key qualities in God’s under-shepherds.

## 3/26 Numbers 24:17

*17 I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.*

Balaam was offered a great reward to curse Israel, but he insisted that he would only say what the LORD spoke to him. He divined some of the blessings that God had spoken before to the patriarchs such as, “Those who bless you I will bless and those who curse you I will curse.” Genesis 12:3 The king who called him was furious and tried again from three different locations to have Balaam utter a curse from God toward Israel.

After the third word of blessing from God, Balaam uttered this final oracle. Once again it sounds like portions of God’s word in the past. Balaam was looking forward and seeing King David’s conquest of the surrounding regions. But by using the “scepter” he was also pointing to the son of David who would reign forever and crush all who are opposed to His righteous reign (Genesis 49:10).

Kings and kingdoms come and go. Even David, a king appointed by God who would fulfill this prophecy, only reigned for a generation. The things man esteems so highly last just a brief moment in time. The star that was coming is forever, and there is nothing anyone can do to change that fact. Those who enter the kingdom of God now by faith in the star, Christ Jesus, will be in it when He comes to reign over all. Those who reject Him now will be rejected then.

Balaam was a very spiritually gifted man, but in the end he gave in to worldly gain. He found another way to receive a reward without prophecy. He told the enemy king the secret to defeating Israel was through carnal temptation. Sadly, that was what was defeating Balaam at that very moment.

Reminder: “We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

## 3/27 Numbers 35:33

*33 You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it.*

The tribe of Levi was given cities to dwell in within the other tribes. These cities were called cities of refuge. If someone accidentally killed a person, he or she could flee to one of these cities and be protected from anyone seeking to avenge the death. Jesus told us that if we hate our brother we are guilty of murder in our heart. Jesus is our city of refuge where our heart can be changed.

There is another lesson to be found in this passage. Pollution is a big topic today. It is only common sense that we should care for our environment. But what baffles me is that the more vociferous about pollution people become, the more trash I see along the roadways. It is the “everyone-but-me” syndrome.

The real pollution of a land is the shedding of innocent blood. We have more shedding of truly innocent blood in our abortion centers than at any time in history, and this is happening worldwide. We are polluting the entire planet. Those who shed innocent blood include all those involved, from the parents to the doctor to the lawmakers and voters that allow it to continue. This is one reason that I believe we are in the Last Days. If God drove the Canaanites from their land because of this, and threatened to do the same to Israel if they shed innocent blood, what should we expect from the hand of God?

There is little to no fear of God today. However, God has not changed. Armageddon will come. In the words of the Apostle Paul, “Because of these, the wrath of God is coming” (Colossians 3:6).

Consider: If I believe the judgments of God are coming upon the earth, how should I live today?

## 3/28 Deuteronomy 3:24

*24 ‘O Lord GOD, you have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as yours?*

The time for Moses’ death was drawing near. In his final book, Deuteronomy, he recounts their journeys and reviews the laws that God had given them. As he came to the end of the retelling of their journey, he recalls praying that the Lord would relent and let him go into the Promised Land.

It is interesting to see that even Moses had the problem of placing blame on others. He told the people that it was because of their rebellious actions that he was not allowed to enter (Deuteronomy 1:37). God said that it was because Moses didn’t believe and honor Him in the sight of the people (Numbers 20:12). Even the greatest men have a tendency to justify their wrongs.

Moses pleaded with God on the basis of wanting to see more of God’s greatness and might. He said that he had just begun to see God’s greatness, even after all the miracles and daily intervention he had witnessed. Seeing God’s mighty actions and recognizing His work in the world and in the lives of individuals teaches us of God’s greatness. The more we see of His work, the more in awe we are of Him. He knew the taking of the Promised Land would reveal even more of God’s glory.

Some things can be changed by prayer, and other things are determined beforehand. God told Moses to not pray anymore about the matter but to go to a mountain top and view the Promised Land. I’ve stood on that mountain peak where Moses viewed the land. It is quite a sight. But the land to which Moses was headed is even more amazing. It is a city with foundations, whose builder and designer is God (Hebrews 11:10).

Consider: Our days are numbered. If you are in Christ, you will go to that city to which Moses was headed. We may long for things on the earth, even a greater knowledge of God and experience of Him, but until we graduate from this life, we are only catching a glimpse. To see Him then will finish the work He has begun in us (1John 3:2).

## 3/29 Deuteronomy 4:24

*24 For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.*

Moses made sure the people understood that because they did not see a form but only heard the voice out of the fire on Sinai, they should never make an image of God. God is a Spirit. The nations around them made gods in the cast or carved forms of people or animals. The Israelites were warned that if they made idols, they would not be in their new land for long. God would cast them out like He was about to cast out the Canaanites.

Why is God so adamant about not making images? The images are the shape of things He has made. The only image that could represent Him is the sinless Son of God that was to come into the world. God sees Israel like a loving husband sees his bride. If a bride was to chase some worthless thing that would destroy her, the husband should be jealous. That is not the jealousy of selfishness

that demands complete attention, but the passionate love of one who truly cares for the welfare of his or her loved one. It is an attribute of God we should highly value.

Under the Old Covenant God dealt severely with the nation and with individuals that turned to idols. That is not foreign to the New Covenant. Ananias and Saphira were struck dead for making an idol of money. (Acts 5:1-9) Our actions influence others, and the spirit of idolatry is infectious. God has not changed. He is still a consuming fire. We don’t often see such immediate judgment and sometimes the judgment is not external, but He is still a consuming fire. The good land we have inherited is the fellowship of true believers. We end up casting ourselves out of that blessing when we pursue false gods.

Ponder: You may have seen those who were growing believers involved in the ministry who then slowly drifted away. In many cases it was the result of another god in their hearts. This is why we must guard our hearts and live in a daily relationship with our loving, invisible God. Take some time to be with Him right now.

## 3/30 Deuteronomy 6:6-7

*6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.*

Moses had just reviewed the Ten Commandments and reminded the people of their vow before God to keep them. He also reminded them of their fear of God and how terrified they were of His presence on the mountain. It is a fear of His justice upon evil and the recognition of that evil in our own hearts. Several times Moses told them that keeping the commands of God was in their best interest. God commanded these things because they were good for them. They would stand out among the nations as a blessed people and the reason would be their relationship with, and obedience to, the one true God.

They were to write the words that God had spoken on their doorposts, and bind them upon their foreheads. In other words, all that they did was to be in light of God’s words. That is the path to blessing. That is the value God wanted them to place on His Word.

But if they did not have the words in their hearts, it would just be ritual without meaning. The Word was always to be remembered in response to the love of God. That had to be conveyed to the next generation as well, or the blessings for obedience would stop with one generation. If it wasn’t a part of daily conversation it would become meaningless to them. God’s words were meant for meditation and discussion. How are you doing in living these instructions? The fact that you are reading this is just a part of the importance that is to be placed on God’s word in our lives. Are you talking about the Word as you go through your day? Are you sharing it with your children and grandchildren?

Prayer: Lord, give me a hunger for Your word. Help me to make it a priority in my life, not just because I will receive a blessing, but in response to the love with which You delivered the Word to me.

## 3/31 Deuteronomy 7:21

*21 You shall not be in dread of them, for the LORD your God is in your midst, a great and awesome God.*

The Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land for the second time. The first time they prepared to enter, the bad report from the spies caused them to be fearful and doubt God. This time God commanded them not to fear. He reminded them of what He did to Pharaoh, to his army, and to those who had attacked them as the journeyed in the wilderness. Past victories should bolster our faith to believe God for what lies before us.

The main reason not to fear is that God is in our midst. For the follower of Jesus this means God is in the congregation and in them personally. We may suffer persecution, illness, and other hardship, but we need not fear. The all-powerful God who loves us is in us and working through us when we allow Him that freedom. He works all things together for good. He will be our guide, even unto our death.

As Jesus faced the cross, I’m sure He was concerned about the suffering of His body, but not fearful. What He may have feared as a man was those hours of separation from the Father. Thankfully, we need not fear that, for He has promised to never leave us or forsake us. Our great and awesome God will see us through this life and all its struggles and receive us into glory! Jesus has gone before us, and He will show us the way.

Remember: Past victories should bolster our faith to believe and trust in God for what lies before us. Are you trusting God for what lies before you today?

April

4/1 Deuteronomy 12:31   
*31 You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.*

God warned the people again and again that they were not to worship the gods of the land they were going in to possess. The reason that God was destroying those people was that their wickedness had become so great. Like Sodom before them, they had given themselves to practices that God detested. One of the most horrendous examples is given in this passage. They sacrificed their own babies in the fire to gods hoping the gods would grant them prosperity.

It is no different today. Because an unwanted pregnancy will cause financial hardship and inconvenience the parent, the baby is sacrificed on the altar of success. The LORD hates that because He gave that life as a blessing. The baby was made in His image. He loves each life, even the life of the baby and of the mothers who gave them up. However, He hates the choice they have made.

God was warning His children that if they took up these vile practices, He would deal with them in the same way. He doesn’t ignore their sins just because they are His chosen people. If anything, He is more severe with them because they have His Word.

We should have the attitude of God: love the sinner but hate the sin. The woman who has made a terrible choice often does not realize the harm she is doing to herself and the blessing that child would have become. She has been told that it is the best thing for them both by those who worship selfishness. These mothers need to hear another voice, the voice of love and truth. Someone needs to come alongside them and lovingly offer an alternative.

Consider: Is there a godly pregnancy-counseling facility or *Young Lives* group in your area? Find out how you can assist them, even it is just helping to raise funds and making others aware of their services. You may even want to donate time or participate in their next march.

## 4/2 Deuteronomy 13:5

*5 But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst*.

Israel had a death sentence for those who tried to turn people to worship other gods. That sounds harsh to us today, but remember what God was uniquely doing with that nation. God had miraculously delivered them and revealed His will for their laws and worship practices. The nations they were displacing were doing despicable things as acts of worship. To have God’s direct intervention in their nation and then to return to the vile things that God hates, things that cause disease and death, should be severely punished. This was not a case of converting someone from one benevolent religion to another, but of defying God to indulge in destructive wickedness. That may help us understand the harsh judgment.

Today we would never implement such a harsh sentence, at least in the Christian-influenced parts of the world. The truth that we can take from God’s command to that nation is His passion to keep us in the ways of truth. Today, the temptation is not so much to be converted to a pagan faith as it is to be seduced by the religion of secularism, to fit in with the world. Society mocks our faith and is constantly trying to convert us from a life of faith. They usually don’t realize the evil they are perpetrating, and, in fact, they often think they are offering us truth.

The evil we need to purge from our midst today is the evil in our own heart that is attracted to the invitation of the world to indulge in lust. That is the evil we must deal with severely. We see it in the Gospels when Jesus suggested we amputate any part of our bodies that draws us into sin. It is better to enter life handicapped, Jesus said, than to enter hell whole (Matthew 5:29).

Consider: A loving God so desperately wants the best for you that He is harsh toward the evil that would lead you astray. He sees the damage it would cause. Do you?

## 4/3 Deuteronomy 15:11

*11 For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’*

Jesus quoted the first sentence of this verse during the last days of His ministry. It was after the woman anointed Him with the expensive ointment. Judas complained that it should have been sold and the money given to the poor. But Jesus explained that it was done to prepare His body for burial and the woman’s act of worship would be forever remembered (John 12:3-8).

The fascinating thing is that a few verses earlier in Deuteronomy, the text says there will be no more poor if they would strictly obey the Lord’s commands. It’s as if the Lord was telling them that He wanted to bless them. Obedience would bring that blessing, but He knows they will not obey.

That is really the story of man. From the beginning the Lord has wanted to bless us, but we will not obey. It was disobedience that caused this world’s fallen condition, bringing with it disease and death. Where is the loving God in a world of pain and suffering? He is the One that invites us into the blessings that obedience brings and walks with us through the effects of sin, while comforting, guiding, and instructing us all the way. Our passage today tells us to be generous when we see the poor and needy. We should be generous because the Lord has been generous with us.

Consider: Stay open to God’s leading. He may work through you to show He is present and cares deeply for the needy and the poor. Is the Spirit prompting you to help a needy person that you know?

## 4/4 Deuteronomy 18:20

*20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.’*

God raised up men and women that spoke as prophets. It was an office that existed until the coming of Jesus (Luke 16:16). These men were to be heeded as the very voice of God. Earlier in today’s passage it tells of the great prophet that was coming, one like Moses. Today we know that was Jesus. The New Testament refers to prophets as well, but they do not have the same authority as those before the time of Christ. Today we weigh the words of someone that is speaking for God by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit within us (1Corinthians 14:29).

Some within the church would like to claim the office of prophet as in the Old Testament. If that is the case then they should expect others to apply the severity of this verse as well. The prophet whose words did not come to pass was put to death.

I have heard many that claimed to hold the office of prophet speak things that were contrary to the Word of God. Their predictions did not come to pass, but no one seems to hold them accountable. Mark carefully the specific words of a person that claims to be a prophet to see if their words come to pass or not. (See Deuteronomy 18:22.) The people today with a prophetic gift rarely if ever call themselves prophets. They humbly share what the Spirit of the Lord is speaking to them and that word bears good fruit. If the listener is a believer, then they too have the Holy Spirit and can discern if the word that was given is of God or not.

Caution: It was a very serious thing in the Old Testament to speak for God. It is a very serious thing today as well. Be sure to check that what you speak or receive lines up with the Word of God.

## 4/5 Deuteronomy 21:23

*23 his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.*

Apostle Paul quoted this verse in Galatians 3:13. He wrote that Jesus hung on the tree of the cross to be cursed in our place. That is an incredible thing to consider. God declared that this was a cursed way to die. Jesus could have been stoned for supposedly blaspheming, but during a short period of time Roman law did not allow it. Instead, capital punishment was by beheading or crucifixion. Because the Sanhedrin accused Jesus of insurrection, the punishment had to be crucifixion. They thought it would be a way to disprove His claim of being the Messiah because it would show He was cursed of God. What they didn’t realize was that it was God’s plan that the curse upon their sins and ours could be placed on Jesus and He would receive the wrath those sins deserve in our place. He was hung on a tree and therefore cursed. But He was taken down. The darkness ended. The debt was paid.

The curse of the Law for disobedience fell upon Christ. All who come to Christ apart from the Law can find salvation by faith, both Jew and Gentile. What love would go to that extent? What love would care enough to take what we deserve? And what is the goal of such love? It is to form the bride of Christ. Those who accept the gift of forgiveness and receive Jesus as Lord begin the transformation from fallen vessels of wrath into the beautiful bride of Christ. What a demonstration of mercy! What an adoring bride we will become when we realize the extent of what He endured for us! What a demonstration of the gracious heart of God! It is no wonder then that those who reject such grace should have no other option than to endure the justice their sins deserve.

Contemplate: How much love did Jesus demonstrate for you and me by becoming cursed for us upon the cross?

## 4/6 Deuteronomy 22:22

*22 “If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel.*

Sexual misconduct, such as rape or adultery, was met with capital punishment. Sex was to be considered a blessing within the bonds of marriage. In many cultures this punishment is seen as barbaric. We have redefined what is acceptable to fit our passions. Children are over-sexualized from an early age and expected to experiment. The common expression today is, “they will do it anyway.” The entertainment industry promotes it and the education system expects it and prepares children for it.

What many do not realize is that the studies of sexuality that led our society in this direction were grossly inaccurate. Once again we find the Bible’s standard of ethics produces a much healthier and happier individual and society. The world teaches that if you do not give in to your inner urges you will not develop in a healthy way. Nothing could be further from the truth. The source of that thinking is that we are pure from birth instead of fallen with a sin nature from the time we are born. Take the world’s thinking to its ultimate conclusion and you have to justify any behavior, no matter how vile or violent. God knew the power of sexual attraction. He gave such harsh punishments to keep the Israelites from “breaking free” (a term used after the building of the golden calf) and becoming enslaved to sexual passion like the people that populated the Promised Land before they arrived.

We are under the laws of the society in which we live and must obey them. But we are also under a moral law and should realize the damage we do to ourselves and to our society when we let sexual passions damage our soul and the lives of others. We should make sure that our children and grandchildren understand how serious God is about sexual boundaries.

Consider: It is never too late to adjust your attitude and thoughts to think in conformity with the will of our Creator. Nor is it ever too late to help your children think properly.

## 4/7 Deuteronomy 29:29

*29 “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

After all the blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience were announced, this was the concluding statement. God has many mysteries that are not revealed to us. But God has revealed many things to us in His Word. We will never understand it all because we don’t understand the mysteries. But what has been revealed is wisdom for us. Obedience to God’s Word brings blessing. The words of God are a gift to help us live in ways that God can bless. They are revealed to us for our good. But should we reject them and live contrary to them, we know what to expect. God has warned us of the consequences.

Under the New Covenant in Jesus’ blood, we no longer have the same societal or food laws, but the principles behind them remain. We are still required to be merciful, just and walk humbly with our God. Jesus has helped us understand some of the deeper meaning of loving our neighbor as ourselves. His words belong to us and to our children forever that we may do them and experience the blessing of living in them.

We have the same problem today that the Israelites had then. We tend to forget and allow the world to influence our thinking. We forget the blessing that comes from the Word and what a gift it is to us. The secret things still belong to God. There are mysteries we cannot fathom. But we have the words of Jesus that reveal to us God’s will for our lives. We know loving God with all our hearts, souls, minds and strength and our neighbor as ourselves brings a blessing upon our lives. This is our blessing. Let us treasure His words each and every day.

Consider: Have you found your heart gratitude for God’s Word fading? Think about how gracious God has been to show you His good way.

## 4/8 Deuteronomy 30:14

*14 But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.*

The Israelites didn’t need a missionary to bring them the truth. They didn’t need to go to some distant land and discover what they had not known. God came to them. He revealed Himself to them. All who possess the Word of God can say that today. We don’t need to ascend into heaven for another revelation. We don’t need to go to Tibet or even Israel. God has come to us.

When we read the Word of God, we know it is true. The Holy Spirit works it into our hearts and our speech. He is faithful to stir in us what we have read. Teachers can help you learn, but the great teacher is the Holy Spirit. He is the One who brings to life what you read and enables you to live it.

Sometimes we think we can’t do something because we are not trained in seminary or taken a special course. Those may be helpful, but they are not what enables you to live the Word. It is the power of the Word itself and the Holy Spirit that prompts us. I am not a seminary graduate, nor do I have a degree in theology. I study, but it is not the studying that prompted me to write these devotions. It was the Word and the faithful Spirit of God.

When we think we can’t do what He is leading us to do because of a lack of training, we are putting too much emphasis on man and not enough on the power of God. Obey Him in the unique way He is leading you and trust Him to work through you. In that way He gets all the glory.

Consider: What has the Spirit of God been prompting you to do? What are you waiting for?

**4/9 Deuteronomy 31:20**

*20 For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to give to their fathers, and they have eaten and are full and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, and despise me and break my covenant.*

The problem with blessing and abundance is that it usually hardens our heart toward God. The Israelites were about to enter their Promised Land and find the abundance that God had promised them. God warned them that in that abundance they would turn to the gods of the people around them. Those gods were gods of fertility. Abundance does not mean satisfaction. The wealthy usually desire more wealth. Instead of being content with God’s blessings, they would lust for more.

It is not that they would forget God. On the contrary, they would despise Him. Why? Because the wealth takes His place in their hearts and the worship of that wealth includes the despising of God who punishes those who turn from His goodness.

Once again we see that nothing has changed. Today’s Christians often bow at the altar of prosperity and despise God by doing what they know they shouldn’t do to gain more wealth. We dishonor the New Covenant when we allow wealth to be first in our hearts and our goal in life. It is not that wealth is wrong, for it is God that blessed them with prosperity. It is that our hearts turn to the gifts instead of the Giver of those gifts.

We can see people in our culture who despise God. It is not that they simply reject Christianity as true, but they hate the limitations it would place on them. They hate the fact that it describes specific acts as sin, including the worship of money. If it were simply another belief system that they think is a myth, there would be no reason for such passion in their denial of it. It is the conviction that truth brings that causes them to despise it so.

Consider: Beware of the times of abundance that your heart not turn from the Giver to the gifts. Those who express such ire against Christianity are often under conviction. Pray that they would yield to that conviction and turn.

## 4/10 Deuteronomy 32:31

*31 For their rock is not as our Rock; our enemies are by themselves.*

One of Moses final acts was to teach Israel a song. The song warned of a future time when they would forsake God and worship the idols of the land. They would face judgment and defeat by their enemies. The only reason they were able to take the land is because God was with them. That is the meaning of the line of the song we are looking at today. Their rock is not as our Rock. Their gods are nothing. They are not a solid place for them to stand. Israel had a solid place to stand, sure footing, in God the Creator who brought them out of Egypt.

The next chapter repeats the idea by saying there is no God like Him, eternal, a place to dwell, who carries us in His arms (Deuteronomy 33:27). The world relies on strength, weapons, finances, cunning, and other things that can be out-done by others. No matter how strong you are, someone may be stronger. No matter how cunning, someone may be more so. But there is none like our God. Their rock is not as our Rock.

In times of great difficulty in life, when hearts are broken, I often wonder where the world turns. How can anyone make sense of anything without faith in our Rock? How can anyone have hope to go on without Him? Truly their rock is not like our Rock, and that is why we must watch for those opportune moments to share Him with them.

Prayer: Thank You for being with me and holding me up in Your everlasting arms through the trials of life. Thank You for being my unshakable, solid Rock!

## 4/11 Joshua 3:17

*17 Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan.*

God is so faithful to put up with our weaknesses and help us to see what is true. The Israelites had seen great wonders done through Moses. Even then they were barely able to follow his lead. They contended with him for most of those forty years in the wilderness, fighting for power, for personal desires, or just insisting they were right and he was wrong. Over and over again God showed that He was working through Moses and that Moses was His servant.

Now Moses is dead. Before he died he ordained Joshua to lead and

placed hands on him, imparting a spirit of wisdom. The people had seen all this and promised to follow Joshua. They even said, “As we obeyed Moses, so will we obey you.” I wonder if Joshua rolled his eyes and thought, “Don’t they remember all the times they and their parents rebelled against him?”

The grace of God started Joshua off with a wonderful miracle that connected the trust they had developed for Moses’ leadership to trust in Joshua. Just as Moses had them cross the Red Sea on dry ground, Joshua was going to lead them across the Jordan at flood stage on dry ground. That prepared them to trust in Joshua’s encounter with God regarding the unconventional plan for conquering Jericho.

When God challenges us to take steps of faith, He usually prepares us in advance with experiences. He knows our doubts and fears. He will graciously prepare us for what is coming next. Today we don’t need a man like Joshua to lead us. We have the God-man, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God’s Word. We do need our trust built up to follow His lead, but don’t worry. Instead, watch and God will prepare you for what comes next. He is gracious and faithful.

Prayer: Lord, increase my faith to follow wherever You lead. Help me to learn from the things You bring me through so that my faith can grow to follow where You lead tomorrow.

## 4/12 Joshua 4:21-22

*21 And he said to the people of Israel, “When your children ask their fathers in times to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ 22 then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.’”*

One of the repeated themes of the Old Testament is remembering the works of God. The Israelites have already been reminded numerous times what the LORD did for them in Egypt. Moses taught them a song so they would remember the warnings God gave for departing from the LORD. In our passage today they were to remember that God held back the flood waters of the Jordan until they all passed.

Remembering God’s mighty acts is one of best defenses against fear and discouragement. God’s dramatic interventions are few and far between. He is always at work in unseen ways in ordinary, daily life. But when He does intervene in ways that awe us, we should do something to that helps us to remember. Then when difficult circumstances come, and they will come, we can encourage our faith with what God did in the past. He may not do some dramatic visible thing in the present, but we can assure ourselves that He is working in unseen ways.

The visible memorial can also give us a chance to teach our children and their children of the great things God has done in our past. Writing is one of the ways we can preserve the memory of these times. Many believers use a journal to record those special times when God answered prayer in a dramatic way or turned the circumstances around so that what we feared did not come to pass. You can collect those highlights in life and share them with others. Children love to hear those stories and in the process you will be teaching them to walk by faith.

Consider: Share the Bible stories with your children, but also share the stories of how God has worked in your life as well. That will help them to see that faith is practical and effective today.

## 4/13 Joshua 7:12

*12 Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted for destruction. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you.*

Israel had followed God’s unusual instructions to defeat the great walled city of Jericho, but one individual had secretly taken things the LORD had commanded them to destroy. The next town on their route was Ai. Their spies said it was a small town so they only sent out part of the army to take it. They were defeated and thirty-six Israelites died.

Joshua fell on his face before the LORD and asked why it had happened. He was worried about the other kingdoms hearing about the defeat and being emboldened to attack them. He was also worried about the reputation of the name of the God of Israel. God told him to get up and deal with the sin that caused the defeat. Remember that God told them the only reason they would be victorious was that God was with them. Now God was promising not to be with them unless they obeyed and destroyed the secret plunder.

The LORD’s presence and blessing in our lives is associated with obedience. We have His promise to finish His work in us and to never leave us or forsake us (Matthew 28:20), but on our journey through life we face temptations of disobedience. God cannot bless disobedience. It would encourage us down the wrong path and have natural consequences that are destructive to our live, which is why His hand of blessing must be lifted from us. The victories we experience in the past become the good ol’ days. Everywhere we turn things seem to get the best of us. Our sin has a negative effect on others. Fortunately for us, God does not require we be executed like the culprit in Joshua’s army. Instead He invites us to confess and forsake our sin and begin anew with His presence and blessing (1John 1:9).

Consider: Why would we even consider disobedience when we know it removes us from the path of blessing? The enemy of our soul promises pleasure but delivers destruction.

## 4/14 Joshua 10:42

*42 And Joshua captured all these kings and their land at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel.*

In one sweeping campaign, Joshua captured all of the strongholds in southern Israel. The Gibeonites pretended they had come from a distant land and tricked Israel into making a treaty with them. Then when the main Amorite kings of southern Israel came to punish Gibeon for joining with their enemy, Israel, Joshua and his army made an all-night march to rescue them. God joined the battle by raining great hailstones on the Amorites. This so weakened their forces that Joshua quickly took all their walled cities.

The Israelites had made a mistake in not taking counsel of the LORD before making the treaty with the Gibeonites, but God worked through the mistake. The same is often true in our lives. We unwittingly sin by not asking God what to do, but God knows our heart. He can even use our mistakes to help us in our spiritual journey. The grace of God is with us even when we miss His perfect will. We may face consequences of our bad decisions, but God can even use those to teach and mature us.

Someone has said we should make every fall a fall forward. Don’t wallow in your mistake. Repent and see how God would use it in your life. The path to victory is sometimes down the road of our mistakes, which instills in us a greater desire to do the right thing next time. Learn the lesson and grow from it. Remember that the LORD is fighting for you. He will finish His work in you. You may be on your way to your greatest victory of all.

Prayer: LORD, keep me from self-pity. Help me to see what You are teaching me through my mistakes and to remember the lessons so that I don’t need to repeat them. Keep my heart looking forward to the victory You have in store for me. Thank You for fighting for me.

## 4/15 Joshua 13:22

*22 Balaam also, the son of Beor, the one who practiced divination, was killed with the sword by the people of Israel among the rest of their slain.*

Joshua was faithful to obey the Lord and conquer and destroy all the kings and their cities throughout the Promised Land. There was only a small portion left and the Lord promised to drive them out. The land was divided among the tribes of Israel. In the account of the division of the land, there is this note about Balaam. He was the one that tried to curse Israel but could only bless them. But because of his lust for money, he found another way. He advised the enemy king to seduce the men by sending in women. (Numbers 31:16) Then the women were to lead the men to worship idols. In that way, Balaam knew God would turn and fight against Israel.

Balaam was right. Sin separates us from God and invites judgment. Balaam surely got his financial gain. But Moses saw what was going on and the Lord put a stop to it with a plague. What good did that financial gain do for Balaam? Here was a man with a special gift to hear the voice of the LORD, yet he allowed his lust for wealth to compromise his desire to obey that voice.

Compromise always sounds like a good idea at the time. It sounds like we can have the best of both worlds. He wasn’t literally doing what God told him not to do; he was just telling the enemy king how to fight spiritually against Israel. Then, in his mind he thought, he could have the money and still not personally curse Israel. To encourage another to sin is a sin. To encourage them to do what we know we are not to do involves us in their sin. The result was the judgment he deserved. Those who know God’s will and turn against it are even more accountable than those who do not know.

Consider: Compromising our integrity is never a good idea. The thing we so desire will do nothing for us in eternity. Set your sights on what is lasting and pleasing to God.

## 4/16 Joshua 22:19

*19 But now, if the land of your possession is unclean, pass over into the LORD’s land where the LORD’s tabernacle stands, and take for yourselves a possession among us. Only do not rebel against the LORD or make us as rebels by building for yourselves an altar other than the altar of the LORD our God.*

When the conquest of Canaan was complete, the tribes that came from east of the Jordan returned home to their families. Before they crossed the Jordan, they made an imposing altar. The other tribes heard about it and assumed they were making an alternate place of worship, something other than the Tabernacle, which was a thing they were forbidden to do in the laws of Moses.

The tribes on the west had enough of disobedience that resulted in plagues and defeat. They gathered their forces to go to war with their brothers on the east to stop any rebellion against God. They knew one rebel’s actions would hurt the entire nation.

Why didn’t Joshua just send an emissary to ask what they were thinking? Assuming a heart motivation behind an action can get us into some serious trouble. Just ask! It happens between friends, family members, and nations and can be devastating to relationships.

However, the hearts of the tribes of the west were in the right place. We can see that the nation finally understood the consequence of rebelling against God. Finally they want the whole nation to stay in the will and ways of God. They just needed to learn how to communicate with the tribes now spread out over the land.

Question: Have you learned the lessons they learned? Will you avoid making assumptions about the heart behind another’s actions?

## 4/17 Joshua 24:31

*31 Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the LORD did for Israel.*

It has been said that God has no grandchildren. In other words, each generation must have individuals who choose to become a child of God. One cannot depend on the faith of his or her parents. The Israelites that saw the amazing hand of God in the wilderness and the conquest of Canaan remained faithful to their commitment to God throughout that generation. But as we will soon see, the next generation flirted with foreign gods, just as Moses and Joshua predicted.

It is important to note that God linked the faithfulness of Israel to the duration of the lives of the elders that had known what God did for Israel. We can see two things here. The first is the importance of the elders guiding and instructing the flock of God. They are constant reminders of the ways of God and the commitments that have been made.

The other important point is that the people personally experienced God at work in their lives. That is why God was so real to them. We need to recognize God’s work in our lives if we are to remain faithful. He works in every life, but most people dismiss it as coincidences. Each generation needs to convey to the next how to watch for God at work and give Him credit and thanks.

The next generation of Israelites did what was right in their own eyes. It is the same in our day. Each one determined for himself or herself what truth should be and what was right. The people who comprised the next generation set aside the Rock, the eternal truth of God, and decided to play god. They forgot His great works in the past and neglected to credit Him for what He was doing in their lives. God was bound by His Word and their oath to discipline them to help them wake up and return to righteousness.

Consider: By taking time in God’s Word, you are remembering His works of old. Are you also giving Him credit for what He is doing today in your life? Keeping these memories of God’s work alive will help you stay faithful.

## 4/18 Judges 2:2

*2 and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done?*

In spite of the earnest desire of the Israelites to obey and live in the blessing of the Lord, where there were difficult places to conquer, they allowed the Canaanites to remain among them. They did not destroy the altars of the false gods when they subjugated an area. Instead of driving them out, they used those people that remained as laborers and taxed them.

The angel of the Lord warned that because they had done this, the Canaanites would be thorns in their sides and their gods would become a snare to them. The Israelites lifted up their voices and wept. The consequences of disobedience are still with them to this day. It eventually resulted in their exile to a foreign land.

It isn’t as if they didn’t know God’s will. It was made very plain to them by Moses and Joshua. They found some excuse to compromise. Compromise is disobedience. It may sound reasonable, and even good. Some today would say it was the right thing to do. Disobedience to God is never right. He is the standard for truth, righteousness, and justice. It was more destructive in the long run to disobey God by having mercy on those that were under God’s judgment.

We face the same thing today when we disobey the Holy Spirit’s voice and help someone in need. Certainly as a general rule we should help the needy, but there are times when someone is under the Lord’s discipline and with our good intentions we can interfere with God’s will. Listen to the Holy Spirit.

Consider: What seems like a kind thing may actually make things worse. God knows the whole story. Listen to the Holy Spirit and obey His voice.

## 4/19 Judges 2:17

*17 Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them. They soon turned aside from the way in which their fathers had walked, who had obeyed the commandments of the LORD, and they did not do so.*

After Joshua and the elders of his generation had died, the next generation that did not see all that God had done for them turned to idols. God raised up leaders called judges. They were men or women who were respected for their discernment and wisdom. They judged between people when there were disputes and led the armies into battle.

The language God uses for their backsliding is instructive, “whored.” They had promised to love God with their all. He was like a husband to the nation. He provided and protected them if they were faithful to Him by keeping His good laws. God sees unfaithfulness to Him as adultery, a lust for another lover. That is why Joshua had warned the people that God is a jealous God.

Even though God had pity on them by raising up anointed judges that would deliver them from their enemies for a time, the Israelites would not listen to the judges. We will see this problem of not listening to God repeated throughout the nation’s history. The prophets will tell them over and over that they refused to listen, and that is the reason for their defeat.

This was written to instruct us. What does your heart desire? Is it something other than God that you think will bring satisfaction to your soul? Are you listening to God’s Word, obeying it, and being faithful in your love relationship with Him?

Prayer: LORD, temptations surround me. I know in my mind that You are the only true source of eternal satisfaction. Help me to see unfaithfulness to You the way You see it. Increase my love for You and help me to always listen and obey.

## 4/20 Judges 6:24

*24 Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD Is Peace. To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.*

The angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon and told him that he was to lead his people against the Midianites. Gideon asked, “Why me?” He said his clan was the weakest in the tribe and he was the least in his family. Surely God had the wrong guy. The LORD told him, “I will be with you!” That makes all the difference. God and one person are always a majority. Sometimes God uses the least so that people will recognize that He is at work.

Gideon asked the angel to stay so he could give him a meal. The angel had him put the meat and bread on a rock and pour the broth over it. Then the angel touched it with the tip of his staff and fire sprang from the rock and consumed the meal. The angel vanished.

Gideon realized he had been talking to the LORD. He was fearful because God said no one could see him and live (Exodus 33:20). The LORD spoke to Gideon again and told him to be at peace and not fear, for he would not die. Gideon had seen the pre-incarnate Son of God, Jesus (Colossians 1:15). Gideon called the altar he built *YHWH Shalom, “*The LORD is Peace”. The LORD was calling him to go to war, yet telling him to be at peace in his own heart.

Peace is not an outward condition, but rather the state of the heart in its relationship to God. Fear is a lack of peace. Do you know the LORD Jesus as your peace? This precious name of God is one that we should look to when fear would overtake our hearts. When days seem impossible to get through, cling to the

LORD Peace.

Consider: When everything seems too much to bear and your heart is overwhelmed, don’t look for the circumstances to change to obtain peace. Look to “The LORD is Peace.” His presence with you is all you really need.

## 4/21 Judges 10:13-14

*3 Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods; therefore I will save you no more. 4 Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress.”*

When the Israelites would find themselves oppressed by a foreign power, they would cry out to the LORD. The reason God allowed the oppressor to have the victory over them was because they were worshiping foreign gods that they thought would bring them success and prosperity. It was the faithfulness of God that showed them that was a false hope. They instinctively knew the reason for their misery. They had turned from the one true God, so they would cry out to Him for help.

God was driving the point home when He told them to cry out to the gods they had been serving. If those gods had any power the Israelites would not be in the situation they were in. They would not be under conviction to return to the one true God. It happened over and over, and the mercy of God would always send a deliverer.

Their repeated backsliding is called “presuming upon the grace of God.” They knew God was merciful and gracious so they were not afraid to return to the foreign gods. That should tell us that other gods are seductive in their lying promises. They appeal to our fleshly nature. The fear of God’s discipline should keep us from turning to them, and the realization that God’s ways are best should deter us as well.

Are there gods of this world that are enticing you to serve them instead of the true God? Image is one that is constantly presented to us a satisfying god. If you were just a little thinner or had a face-lift or some enhancement or extra energy, or those clothes, the advertisements say, you would be much happier. Look at the smiling faces in those ads!

The other god we constantly see advertised is wealth. If you invest in this or that you’ll become wealthy and wealth will provide things that make you happy and secure. But when calamity strikes, we can cry out to those gods, but they will never save us, or comfort us, or give us the strength to endure. What god are you serving? The only one worthy to be served is the Creator of all good things. He is the only One that can answer us in our times of need.

Prayer: Keep my heart fixed on You, LORD. Expose the lie of false gods. Help me to remember and obey the commandment to worship and serve You and You alone (Exodus 20:3-5).

## 4/22 Judges 13:18

*18 And the angel of the LORD said to him, “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?”*

Over and over again, Israel turned from God, was oppressed by an enemy, and cried out to God. God raised up a new judge to lead and deliver them. The account of Samson begins with the Angel of the LORD appearing to Samson’s parents. He gave them instructions on how to raise the child. Like Gideon before them, they asked to make a meal for Him. The Angel told them He would not eat it, but they could offer it to the LORD.

The future father of Samson, Manoah, did what Gideon did many years earlier. He brought the meal and put it on a rock. As the flame consumed the offering, the Angel went up in the flame from the altar and disappeared from their sight. It was then that they knew they had seen the LORD. They responded in fear, just as Gideon had done, but the wife reasoned that if God meant to kill them He would not have given them instructions on how to raise their son.

Our verse today took place before Manoah brought the offering. Manoah wanted to give credit to the one that predicted the birth of their future son, so he asked His name. The angel replied that it is “wonderful.” The word could be translated “incomprehensible.” The word is used when God works in ways that man cannot explain.

We saw in the case of Gideon that the Angel was the pre-incarnate Christ. In the prophecy of the coming Messiah by Isaiah, we can see the Spirit of God used a variation of this same name, “Wonderful Counselor” (Isaiah 9:6). Jesus has been working in the affairs of man throughout history. He has always heard cries for mercy demonstrates forgiveness and grace to every generation. He is near all who call upon Him with a sincere heart (Psalm 145:18).

Consider: Can you see more clearly now why the Apostle Paul would quote Joel 2:32 in Romans 10:13? “Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

## 4/23 Judges 14:4

*4 His father and mother did not know that it was from the LORD, for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.*

Samson had a problem that is all too prevalent today: “lust at first sight.” Though God had given him a great gift, Samson could not control his passions. The story begins with him asking his father to arrange a marriage to a Philistine woman he saw. The father pleads for him to take a wife from his own people, but Samson insisted on the Philistine woman because she was pleasing in his eyes. I would call this idolatry. He thought a certain form would bring him satisfaction.

Woman after woman, Samson never seemed to learn to discern that real beauty is inward. However, as our verse today shows us, God used his spiritual weakness to beat back the oppressors of Israel with physical strength. God will have His way in spite of our failures. We just miss out on the eternal rewards of being obedient servants and the joy of cooperating with the Holy Spirit.

The story of Samson covers so many chapters because men have had the same problem throughout history. An unguarded heart that gives in to lust will destroy a man’s ministry. The Philistines finally captured Samson and put out his eyes. That is interesting, because his eyes were the entryway for his problem. You could almost understand that as the mercy of God. Remember that Jesus said, “If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off” (Mark 9:43). God may allow us to be afflicted to save our ministry. Many of God’s servants have Jacob’s limp.

Consider: What could Samson have accomplished with God’s help if he had tamed his passions? Is there something in your life keeping you from being all that God has called you to be?

## 4/24 Ruth 1:16

*16 But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.*

Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their two sons moved from Bethlehem during a time of famine to the Moabite region. Her sons took Moabite women for wives. During the ten years they were there, Elimelech and both sons died. When Naomi heard that Bethlehem was fruitful again, she decided to return. Her daughters-in-law were going to go with her, but she dissuaded them. One of them turned back, but the other, Ruth, would not leave Naomi. She vowed to be a part of Israel and worship their God.

This is a beautiful expression of familial love and commitment, but it also shows us that God always welcomed into Israel those that desired to worship the one true God. Ruth was willing to leave her people and gods simply from what she had seen in Naomi.

In Psalm 45, a picture of the LORD as our groom, we are told to forget our people and our father’s house and the king will desire our beauty. Jesus taught that if anyone would come after Him, he or she had to put Him first above family. This teaching goes all the way back to the first couple who were told by God that a woman was to leave her family and cling to her husband (Genesis 2:24).

The kingdom of God is open to those who will put Jesus first in their lives above all other commitments. He deserves to be first because He is our Creator. He should be first because He is good in every way. He must be first because of His great love for us. Is there anything you have put before Him? Will you follow Him wherever He leads?

Consider: Where God leads may be uncomfortable and unfamiliar, but that only draws us closer to Him.

## 4/25 Ruth 2:20

*20 And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!”Naomi also said to her, “The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.”*

Every tribe and family had land that God had given to them. It was to remain with that tribe or family. You could rent it but you could not sell it permanently unless it was to someone within the tribe. Because there were no male heirs for the property of Naomi’s husband, the closest kinsman had the option of buying it from her. To do so was called “redeeming the land.”

It just so happened in God’s providence that the field Ruth was gleaning belonged to Boaz, a close relative of Naomi’s son. But there was a closer relative than he. The one who redeems the land must also take the wife of the son to raise up children as heirs of the property. Boaz decided to redeem the land and take Naomi as wife. He first had to ask a closer relative if he would do so. The man said he could not, so Boaz took Ruth as his wife and purchased the property. The couple became the grandparents of King David, and they are in the lineage of Jesus.

The earth was given to Adam to tend and enjoy. Sin caused the spiritual death of the human race. Satan claimed the earth as his own because sin caused us to be his slaves. We needed a kinsman redeemer. We needed someone to purchase us back and take us as his bride, but no man could because all men were slaves to sin. Then came Jesus, one of us, but sinless. He alone could redeem the earth and us vessels of dirt and take us for His bride.

The price was very high. The penalty for our sins was death. He paid it in His own blood. The earth has been redeemed and we are His bride. There is some cleanup work yet to do, and the marriage is not yet consummated. Satan, the usurper, will not give up without a fight. The battle is coming. The earth will be cleansed, and those who receive Jesus will be His bride forever. The story of Boaz and Ruth was a true event, but in God’s providence it was also a picture of God’s great story.

Consider: If you are in Christ, you have been redeemed. That is a reason for great joy!

## 4/26 1 Samuel 1:11

*11 And she vowed a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.”*

Hannah had gone with her husband to worship at the tabernacle which was under the care of Eli the high priest. She had not been able to have children. It was a great burden on her heart. She poured her heart out to God in prayer and fasting. Our verse today is her prayer.

Eli saw her lips moving and thought she was drunk. He rebuked her. But then, after hearing her story, he blessed her and told her God would answer her prayer. God did answer her prayer and she was faithful to do as she promised. The boy’s name was Samuel. He was the last and greatest Judge of Israel before the period of the kings.

I know a woman who prayed this same prayer. She had daughters, but wanted God to give her a son. Her husband was a pastor and she knew the difficult life of that calling. In time, her son heard the call of God, and like Hannah before her, she encouraged her son to follow God’s leading. His ministry touched many lives.

I’m not trying to tell you that God will answer every prayer you pray in the way you expect, but I would advise you to take a vow before God very seriously. Watch for God to do what you had asked, and then remember to be faithful to keep your vow. Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 tells us to not delay in paying a vow to God, and that it is better not to vow than to make a vow and not pay it.

Consider: Have you neglected to do what you promised after God responded to a vow you made?

## 4/27 1 Samuel 2:35

*35 And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever.*

Eli was unable to control his sons who were priests of the tabernacle. They would rob the offerings and even have relations with women that ministered to the LORD. A prophet came to Eli and told him that because of his sons’ actions, the priesthood would be given to another family. Eli’s sons would both die on the same day. Now we begin to see why Hannah would have in her heart to give her son, Samuel, to the LORD. Eli must have learned from his mistakes with his sons. He appears to have raised Samuel to have the fear of the LORD and a desire to be faithful to Him.

The words of our verse for today are a part of the prophecy to Eli. Like most prophecies, they have an intermediate and an ultimate fulfillment. The immediate fulfillment was that Samuel became the greatest Judge and priest of that period of Israel’s history. But we know this is not only about Samuel, for the priest in this prophecy serves forever. That tells us this is ultimately about Jesus, our great High Priest.

His house is made up of His family. His family members are all that receive Him as Lord and redeemer. He always lives to faithfully intercede for us (Hebrews 7:25). Priests and pastors fail and often succumb to temptation. A few like Samuel remain faithful for life, but Jesus is faithful forever. Keep you focus on the faithful great High Priest who is even now interceding for you and me. He is the only One that has done all that is in God’s heart and mind.

Consider: Is your faith dependent on a man? Men will fail, but Jesus never fails!

## 4/28 1 Samuel 6:6

*6 Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? After he had dealt severely with them, did they not send the people away, and they departed?*

The LORD brought His word to pass in one day. The Philistines went to war with Israel. Eli’s sons were killed. The Ark of the Covenant was captured. When Eli heard the news, he fell backward and broke his neck and died.

The Philistines put the ark in their temple. The next morning, the statue of their god, Dagon, was found lying on the ground before the ark. They stood it back up. The next morning it was on the ground again with the head and arms broken away from the trunk. The people began to grow tumors and some died. They realized these were judgments from the God of Israel and decided they wouldn’t make the same mistake the Egyptians made. This shows us that even four-hundred years after the exodus the people of the land were still familiar with the story.

To discover if it was really God or just a coincidence, they took the ark and put it on a cart. Two milk cows that had never been yoked were yoked to the cart. Their calves were penned up. The cows left their calves and took the ark back to Israel and the plagues on the Philistines ceased.

God disciplines us today as well. Nations and individuals experience His heavy hand. Today, however, hearts are so hard that they will not even consider that it may be because of their rebellion against Him. God was faithful to show His power to the Philistines and some of them may have come to believe in the one true God, just as many Egyptians did. It is the love of God that afflicts to turn us from our false ways and show us what is true. There are times when nothing short of desperation will turn us to Him.

Consider: What will it take to turn our nation back to God?

## 4/29 1 Samuel 7:12

*12 Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, “Till now the LORD has helped us.”*

The Ark of the Covenant had been returned to Israel, but the people knew God was not pleased with them. It was a time of national repentance. The nation gathered at the city of Mizpah to fast and pray. The Philistines saw this as an opportunity to attack them again. The Israelites cried out for Samuel to intercede for them.

The LORD thundered a mighty sound and threw the Philistines into a state of confusion. Israel soundly defeated them and took back the cities the Philistines had captured. Samuel took a stone and stood it up as a marker and reminder that the LORD had helped them. He called the stone, Ebenezer, which means stone of help. During the life of Samuel, the Israelites would be free from Philistine invasions.

In the classic hymn, “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” the second verse begins, “Here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by Thy help I’ve come.” The song writer and all who sing the hymn are acknowledging that they came this far in life by the help of God. We can all put up a stone to remind ourselves of the ways God has blessed and helped us. Where would we be without His grace drawing us to Him and His word to renew our minds?

Consider: Take some time right now to give thanks for God’s continual intervention in your life. Count your blessings. Raise an Ebenezer.

## 4/30 1 Samuel 8:18

*18 And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”*

Samuel was a godly judge, but he had the same problem that Eli had before him. His sons became corrupt. Because there are godly fathers does not always mean there will be godly sons. The people saw the corruption and asked Samuel to appoint a king to reign over Israel so that they could be like the other nations. That did not sit well with Samuel. He took it to the LORD.

The LORD told him it was because they had rejected the LORD ruling over them. He had Samuel warn them about how the king would treat them: taxation, conscription, annexation, and other abuses. When man reigns, selfishness and power mongering become evident. The greater the power, the more they will abuse that power. Our verse today was the final warning. They could choose a king, but they shouldn’t expect God to run to their rescue when they faced the consequences of that choice. Still, the people insisted on a king.

Sometimes we wonder why God is not helping us in our distress. It could be because we are facing the consequences of what we have insisted upon doing. We may have had a check in our spirits, or even had someone warn us, but we went ahead and did what everyone else is doing. Then we wonder why God doesn’t run to rescue us from the consequences.

In spite of the warning, God did often aid Israel when they cried out to the LORD over an abusive king. He will often help us as well. Just realize it is an abundance of grace and mercy that helped us out of the mess we chose, and learn the lesson. Ultimately, obedience is the easier road.

Consider: Man always looks for a hero, whether a politician or a warrior; but we already have the greatest hero of all, Jesus! He is the King of Glory!

May

## 5/1 1 Samuel 10:6-7

*6 Then the Spirit of the LORD will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man. 7 Now when these signs meet you, do what your hand finds to do, for God is with you.*

The Lord had told Samuel that a man from the tribe of Benjamin would come to meet him and that this man was to be the future king. Saul was searching for his father’s donkeys and went to Samuel for direction. Samuel anointed Saul with oil and gave him several signs to verify the prophecy of him becoming king. The last sign was that at Gibeah he would meet a group of prophets who were prophesying, and he would prophesy with them and be turned into another man. Once these signs had taken place, he was to do what came to him, for God was with him.

Every believer in Jesus is in a similar condition. We have encountered the Holy Spirit and been turned into another man and anointed for ministry. Saul protested that his family was the least in the tribe of Benjamin. His humble attitude about himself is the humble attitude of the believer. After God uses him to do great things, that will change. We should heed the warning. When God uses us to do something, we need to remember that it is all due to His work in us. Remember your condition when He called you.

God puts things in our heart and mind to do, just as He did with Saul. Since we know that God is with us, we should go forward with that assurance and give Him the opportunity to work through us. Nothing is impossible for God. The next chapter tells of Saul leading the Israelites in a great victory over the Ammonites. All of Israel accepted him as king.

Lesson: When God calls you, know that what He puts in your heart is something He can accomplish through you. When He does, remember that it is all His work and stay humble.

## 5/2 1 Samuel 12:21

*21 And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty.*

Samuel reminded the people of their history of turning away from God, suffering defeat, then returning to Him, and God sending a deliverer. He exhorted them to not turn aside from following the LORD, but to serve Him with their whole heart. That was followed by our verse for today. Don’t turn to empty things that can’t profit or deliver. They are empty.

We have the same problem because the heart of man never changes. As a nation we trust in military might or financial strength. Another nation can arise that is more powerful or sinister. Our economy can fail like the nations before us that kept demanding more and more handouts. Corruption can ruin the strongest and wealthiest nations. The more powerful and wealthy they are, the more likely they are to become corrupt.

Nations become vulnerable because the people turn aside to empty things. The nation is simply a reflection of its citizens. We personally turn to wealth, our own ability, or pleasure instead of our hearts following after the One that can profit and deliver us. He is the One that gives us power to get wealth. He is the One who preserves us from our enemies. Everything else is empty.

Take a twenty dollar bill out of your wallet and look at it. A million of them can’t save you. It is an empty thing. Look at your hands. What would happen to them if you were diagnosed with a debilitating disease tomorrow? Your hands can’t save you. Everything that we turn to other than the LORD is empty. Follow Him! Serve Him!

Prayer: Lord, when my heart turns to vain things, remind me how empty they are. Then remind me of Your great power to deliver and to make my life profitable. Help me to serve You with my whole heart.

## 5/3 1 Samuel 14:6

*6 Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, “Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the LORD will work for us, for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few.”*

Jonathan was the son of King Saul. He had surely heard the story of Gideon and his band of 300 routing a countless army of invaders. He knew in his heart that if God was with you, the odds against you did not matter. He determined that if the Philistines called him to come up the hill to them, then God was going to deliver them into his hands. But if they said to stay where they saw him, then it was not to be at that time.

Sure enough, they called him to come up to them. He and his armor bearer went up against overwhelming odds, and a great defeat of the Philistines followed. God and one are a majority. Jonathan did not look at the size of the army he was facing, but at the greatness of his God.

We are always tempted to look at the physical and make calculations, but if God’s will is involved, then all the practical reasoning in the world goes out the window. He can do as He pleases. He is never limited by circumstances. Faith looks at the greatness of God not the circumstances.

When we are led by the Spirit of God, we have to fix our gaze on the greatness of God or we will become fearful and doubt His will. Our trust must be in Him and His Word and not in our own ability, statistics, programs, or previous success. God does great things through us when we will listen for His leading and act on it in faith.

Consider: Has the Lord been leading you to do something that just doesn’t seem reasonable? Fix your eyes on His greatness and step out in faith.

## 5/4 1 Samuel 15:29

*29 And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.”*

Saul disobeyed the LORD’s command again. The first time was to offer a sacrifice before battle instead of waiting on Samuel to come and do it. His excuse was that the army was dwindling. This time he did not utterly destroy the property of the Amalekites but saved the best of the livestock. His excuse was that he was going to sacrifice it to the LORD and blamed the army for persuading him. Samuel announced to Saul that God had rejected him being king over Israel. Saul pleaded for forgiveness and the response from Samuel was our verse for today. God doesn’t lie or have regret.

At the close of the chapter it is clearly stated that God regretted making Saul king. It is the same word that Samuel used in saying God is not like a man that has regrets. Obviously, the author knew of the apparent contradiction. What is being said?

Making Saul king was a choice that the people made. Though God selected Saul, it would not have mattered what man was chosen. God had already warned them how demanding a king would be on the nation. God regretted their decision to turn from a theocracy to a monarchy.

However, when God makes a decree, He is not lying nor does He regret what He has said. He doesn’t wake up one day and realize He made a mistake or missed an important factor. God saw Saul’s heart and how it was turning toward pride. God knew Saul would not turn back with a humble and truly repentant heart. His decree to remove Saul from being king would not be a decision He would regret. God regrets our bad decisions but never His good decisions.

Consider: God is not moved by feigned acts of contrition. He knows the direction we have chosen. Blessing only comes upon the truly repentant heart that is changing the direction of one’s life.

## 5/5 1 Samuel 16:18

*18 One of the young men answered, “Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the LORD is with him.”*

Samuel had secretly anointed David to be the next king of Israel. Saul was suffering from an evil spirit that would come upon him. The court knew that soothing music would drive the spirit away. One young man in the court of King Saul knew of David and recommended him. Consider the qualities mentioned regarding David. He was a skillful musician, but he was also a man’s man and able to fight. He was prudent in speech. He knew how to control his tongue, which would be essential if he was to work for the king. He had a good presence. This probably means he wasn’t melancholy or too boisterous or overbearing. But the final quality was probably the clincher. The LORD was with him. What was it about David’s life that would cause someone to say that?

We know from his history and the psalms that he was a person that trusted the LORD. That shows in a number of ways. There is an inner peace that can be seen outwardly on those who truly put their confidence in God. He was fearless because of this trust. With God’s help he killed a lion and bear that came to devour his sheep. He wasn’t self-confident, but rather, he was God-confident. Though he had been anointed as the next king, he waited upon God to bring it to pass and served faithfully. That is quite a testimony for a young man that was probably in his early teens.

A personal relationship with God will put you where you need to be to learn the things you need to learn. We are often tempted to rush ahead and try to fulfill what God has in store for us, when what we really need to do is be faithful to learn the lessons that prepare us for what is ahead as we serve faithfully where God has placed us. Who would have guessed that the place to train to take the leadership of the nation was right under the jealous king’s nose? David was learning the weight of responsibilities that lay ahead, the pitfalls of pride, and an even greater trust in God’s ability to fulfill His Word.

Consider: God has placed you where you are to learn from Him and draw near to Him. It may seem like an insignificant life, but remember that He is using our circumstances to draw us close to Him. “The LORD is with him,” was David’s greatest testimony.

## 5/6 1 Samuel 18:12

*12 Saul was afraid of David because the LORD was with him but had departed from Saul.*

David killed the gigantic warrior named Goliath. The women sang the praises of David. Saul became increasingly jealous of him. God allowed an evil spirit to torment Saul. He even tried to spear David while David was playing the harp for him. What really bothered Saul was that the anointing to be king was gone from him and was seen on David.

There was absolutely no reason for Saul to fear David. Saul could never have found a more faithful and loyal soldier. Jealousy is unreasonable. It imagines things that are not happening and ascribes motives that don’t exist. It feeds on scenarios in the mind that have little to do with reality. Saul was destroying himself with jealousy.

Meanwhile, Saul assigned David to be a commander of 1000 soldiers, probably hoping David would die in battle. But David’s fame only grew. Others could see the anointing too and were drawn to David. The apostle Paul said that we can do nothing against the truth but only for the truth (2Corinthians 13:8). It is useless to fight against God. The best thing to do is to join Him in His work in the world. Saul should have abdicated and set David on the throne, but his pride would never allow him to do that.

Consider: Do you find yourself in this story? If you have lost the anointing, repent with all your heart. Humble yourself and give the lead to the one that is anointed. If you are in David’s shoes, continue to serve faithfully without speaking against your leader. Trust God to change things in His time and way. If you are one of those drawn to a David, remember, Saul began as a humble anointed king. Be sure you are following the LORD in the man and not the man. Remember that all of us are nothing without the LORD.

## 5/7 1 Samuel 22:2

*2 And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became captain over them. And there were with him about four hundred men.*

When David learned that King Saul was intent on killing him, he fled to a cave in the wilderness. His family came to join him, and the outcasts of society also came. It reminds us of Jesus, the friend of sinners. God’s heart is for the lowly. They know they need God. They seek God’s help and know they are dependent on Him. That is the attitude that pleases the heart of God.

The successful in this world are rarely seeking after God. They think they have it all together until some tragedy strikes. Then they realize they really don’t control anything. We are helpless without God. The sooner we come to grips with our great need for God the better.

We see this illustrated in churches as well. The wealthy ones that are filled with the most educated tend to drift toward formality and liberalism. The third world churches that are filled with people that seek God each day for enough food to survive don’t want to stop praising God and can’t get enough of time together worshiping Him. Those churches are vibrant with life. They also tend to be more generous with the little they have.

Consider: It doesn’t matter which situation you find yourself in. What matters is your heart. Is it to follow God wherever He leads, totally dependent on Him? Remember God’s heart for the least in society. If you share God’s heart, you will find they gather to you too, as they are encouraged by your trust and dependency upon God.

## 5/8 1 Samuel 23:14

*14 And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand.*

David had done nothing wrong. In fact, David was the king’s best servant and most faithful warrior. It was King Saul’s sin that lost him the kingdom and stirred insane jealousy in his heart. That jealousy distorted the way Saul thought of David, disconnecting his thoughts from reality. Sin causes a kind of mental distortion of what we observe. David and his men had to live a meager existence under constant stress because of Saul’s sin.

It is impossible to escape the consequences of others’ sin. We all experience times in life when we have done nothing wrong, and yet we are treated as if we had. Christians should be any country’s most loyal citizens, but we are often looked on with suspicion, not because of anything we have done, but because reality is distorted in the mind of sinful men.

It is a time of spiritual growth. We learn to lean upon God. The close calls and dealing with stress teach us to trust God in a deeper way than we ever had before. It strengthens our relationship with God. David could have whined about the injustice of it all, or he could grow as a leader of his people by strengthening his confidence in the God who can see us through any situation.

Consider: Life in this world is often unjust. How you deal with that injustice determines whether it will benefit you or not. You decide if you will let it cause your spirit to shrink or grow in faith.

## 5/9 1 Samuel 25:33

*33 Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from avenging myself with my own hand!*

David and his men were living in the wilderness. While they were there, they protected the herds of a very wealthy man, Nabal. When the time of shearing came, David sent men asked for a gift to compensate them for the protection they provided. Nabal rebuked the men and sent them away empty-handed. David had his men prepare for war and was determined to kill every man with Nabal.

Meanwhile, Nabal’s wife, Abigail, heard what happened, loaded donkeys with gifts, and secretly took them to David. She told David that she knew Nabal was a fool and that he should have rewarded David. She also wisely suggested that if he took vengeance himself, he would regret it later when he became king. David saw the wisdom in her words, her humility, and the discretion she showed. He realized that vengeance belongs to the LORD. He blessed Abigail and called off the attack. Ten days later Nabal died of what sounds like a heart attack.

David took Abigail as his wife. Young men should notice that this is the kind of wife you should seek out, one who knows the ways of the LORD, has discretion, and is humble and wise. Young women should seek the qualities of Abigail. But the main lesson here is that God will deal with injustice. We should never respond in anger to injustice, but rather commit it to God who is the final judge. Doing something in anger will often result in years of regret. Learn to give things to God.

Prayer: LORD, I know when my anger flares in the midst of injustice that I am tempted to act in a rash way. Help me remember that vengeance belongs to You. Help me trust You and leave it in your capable hands.

## 5/10 1 Samuel 29:9

*9 And Achish answered David and said, “I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God. Nevertheless, the commanders of the Philistines have said, ‘He shall not go up with us to the battle.’*

In spite of two miraculous deliverances, David feared that Saul would eventually kill him, so he fled to the Philistine territories and lived in the region under King Achish. When David and his men would go out on a raid, he would go to one of the enemies of Israel, but tell Achish that he was raiding Israel. David’s fear had placed him in an awkward position. He had to lie to cover where his loyalties really lay.

Then the Philistines gathered for an all-out assault on Israel. Achish wanted to bring David along as his bodyguard. Again David is in an awkward position because he was led by his fear rather than by faith. Achish’s words of David being blameless must have stung David’s heart. This time the LORD intervened for David. The other commanders did not want David in the battle as they feared he would turn on them. God had intervened for David even when he was reaping the consequences of not trusting God. How gracious is God!

Yet there were still consequences back home. Raiders had come and taken the women and children and goods and burned their city while David was marching with the Philistines. David’s men spoke of stoning David for leading them into this situation. Again, God was gracious to David, and all their families were recovered.

The Philistines were fighting a battle in which King Saul and his son Jonathan would die. David was about to become king, but his lack of trust in God had nearly derailed the transition.

Consider: David was not a perfect man, but he was a man after God’s heart. There were consequences for his lack of trust, but God’s grace is abundant. We find that we are made from the same material. As much as we would like to please God, our lack of faith is often a poor testimony. Think of the ways God has been gracious to you and spared you from the full consequences of your sin. Thank God for His abundant grace!

## 5/11 2 Samuel 5:12

*12 And David knew that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.*

After Saul’s death, the kingdom of Israel was divided for seven years. The house of Saul grew weaker while the house of David grew stronger. Finally, all Israel made David king. Everything David did pleased the people. They could see he was a man of integrity. David’s years of being an outcast were over.

David knew his success was all the LORD’s doing. God had rewarded David’s faithfulness. Ultimately, David was exalted for the sake of the people of Israel. When the people have a heart toward the LORD and desire His will, He will bless them with a godly leader. Of course, the opposite is true as well. When the people turn from God, He will give them the leader they deserve. But that, too, is the love of God to turn the people back to Him.

Because of God’s love for His people, He exalted David. David would make plans for the Temple. He would enlarge the borders of Israel. He would create musical instruments and songs of praise to be sung in the worship of God. But the greatest blessing of all was the promise that a descendant of David would reign forever. God exalted the kingdom of David for the sake of all people. One day that descendant, the Messiah, will reign in righteousness on David’s throne forever (Isaiah 9:7).

Consider: Is He reigning in your heart today?

## 5/12 2 Samuel 7:18

*18 Then King David went in and sat before the LORD and said, “Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?*

David had brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and put it in a tent he had made for it. He told God he would build a house for the ark. The prophet Nathan told David that it was God who would build a house for David. The Messiah would be his descendant and would reign forever.

Unlike Saul before him, David had remained humble and obedient, at least to this point in his life. His response to the prophecy was to ask, “Why me?” He realized it was only grace and nothing that he or his family had done to deserve such an honor. Grace is hard to understand. We feel like we should deserve it, but paradoxically, the ones who are blessed to receive it are the ones that realize they don’t deserve it.

It is this unmerited favor that causes our hearts to melt before His goodness. We don’t deserve anything but judgment yet, over and over and over we see the blessing of God in our lives. If David was blessed to be an ancestor of the Messiah, how much more are we blessed to be a recipient of the saving work of the Messiah, Jesus! We can say with David, “Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?” And God is not done with us yet. He has much more in store. What a gracious and loving God! And His love births love in us to love Him and our neighbor.

Meditation: Think on how many blessings you have received to this point in your life and how unworthy you are to have received them. Think of the love that showered that grace upon you.

## 5/13 2 Samuel 12:13

*13 David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.*

I shared the story of David and Uriah in *Through the Bible Daily Devotional* (June 10). God had his prophet Nathan confront David about his sin of murder and adultery. These few choice words describe how God felt about David’s actions: “despised the Word of the LORD (verse 9)”, and “scorned the LORD (verse 14)”. After all God had done and promised to David, David hardened his heart and gave in to temptation. Those in power often try to get away with something they would never forgive others of, simply because they can. Sometimes they try to justify it by reasoning that they deserve that liberty because of the pressures of their position.

But it isn’t just those who have power that give in to sin, as we all know. Sin promises more than it can deliver and costs more than we will ever want to pay. It would cost David the life of his baby, the peace of his kingdom, and the violation of his wives. Up to this point in David’s career, you could only say good things about David’s integrity and behavior. Now his testimony is tarnished with these sins, but even more, with the fact that after acknowledging the enormity of God’s goodness and blessing on his house, he scorned the LORD. That is the beginning of all of our sins.

Our verse today tells us why God chose David and a great deal about the forgiveness of God. David confessed his sin against the LORD and repented. God forgave his sins. He would still face negative consequences, but he was forgiven. The cost of that forgiveness and that of all sin is the cross of Jesus. When we look at the cross we see all mankind’s scorning of the LORD. To all who have accepted that forgiveness, our hearts grieve at the price God paid that we might be forgiven.

Consider: Despising the LORD’s word and scorning Him by sinning against Him brings consequences that are costly; but even worse, they brought about the suffering of Christ on the cross. God was good to David in exalting him, but the goodness that would pay for his sin and ours is so great that we cannot fathom it.

## 5/14 2 Samuel 12:23

*23 But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.”*

The prophet’s words came to pass. The baby, born from the sin of David and Bathsheba, grew ill. David fasted and prayed prostrate on the ground. The elders of his house tried to raise him and get him to eat, but he would not budge. Finally the baby died. The elders were whispering to each other wondering what David would do if they told him. They feared David might even harm himself in grief.

David saw them whispering and knew the baby died. He arose, went to the house of God, worshiped, and then ate a meal. The elders didn’t understand so they asked why his demeanor changed. David’s answer is our verse today. Certainly there is no greater loss than the loss of one’s child. However, David was a realist. He knew there was nothing more he could do. It was time to move on, even in the midst of the pain, and learn from his sin. He knew one day he would see that baby again, but not in this life.

This is an important lesson. Even though something is extremely painful, there is time to get up and go forward. When God has the final say, we must accept His decision, worship Him, go on with this present life while learning from our past. Take the lesson and let go of the turmoil in your soul. Many times we will not understand God’s ways, but we can trust His heart. When you are tempted to doubt His heart, look at the cross. Don’t blame Him for the consequences of your sin or that of others. Let go and trust Him. Move on. The pain will lessen with time. His grace will see you through. He knows the pain in your heart like no one else. If you must place blame, place it on the sin that permeates this fallen world. It was never God’s desire.

Consider: What a wonderful world we would be living in if sin had never entered it! If you are in Christ, that is where you are headed, a world without sin.

## 5/15 2 Samuel 15:4

*4 Then Absalom would say, “Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice.”*

One of David’s sons, Absalom, had his half-brother murdered in revenge for raping his sister. Then Absalom fled to another country. After a bit of trickery on General Joab’s part, the king allowed Absalom to return to Israel. Eventually the relationship with his father was restored. But Absalom had something else in mind.

Absalom used his good looks and flattery to win the hearts of the people. In return for the mercy shown him, he plotted insurrection. Every time someone would come with a complaint, Absalom would sympathize with them and tell them how he wished he were judge so that he could help them. He slowly won over the heart of many of the people.

Absalom was an ungrateful con man. He cared only about himself. Everything he did was to advance his own cause, while pretending to really care about others. This kind of personality is still among us, and we must be discerning. This was the very thing that Nathan the prophet predicted would be the consequence of David’s indiscretion. While it was Absalom’s freewill to be so treacherous, it was his father’s sin that set things in motion. Had David foreseen all the consequences of fulfilling his lusts, he surely would have run the other way. When sin knocks at the door, we rarely stop to consider the long-term consequences and pain that will result from a moment of pleasure.

Consider: Be discerning, both of words of flattery, and of temptation when it knocks at your door.

## 5/16 2 Samuel 23:3-4

*3 The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me: When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, 4 he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.*

To rule justly is to rule in the fear of God. It is to know that God will deal with every injustice and hold us accountable. It is not only for rulers. We all rule over our own lives. Each and every life can dawn on his or her family like the morning light and like a refreshing rain, if we will live in the fear of God. When I was young I often heard the expression, “God is watching you.” Children had a sense of the justice of God. We might be able to hide our actions from men, but never from God who is our final judge. Has our culture talked itself out of the fear of God?

In an earlier chapter, the nation of Israel was enduring a famine. David sought the Lord to know why. He knew the discipline of God was on them for some disobedience. Something had to be made right. People laugh at that thought today. What happened to our nation’s fear of God?

If we think we can get away with some injustice because man does not find out, then injustice will be the hallmark of our nation. You do not need to follow that error. Live knowing the Judge is observing all that you do and will hold you accountable for your actions. Live to be the light of morning dawning on people and a refreshing rain to them.

God has said that our sin will find us out (Numbers 32:23). Rarely do men get away with secret injustice even in this life. One lie requires another to prop it up and then another until they all come crashing down like a house of cards. If you consistently tell the truth, you never have to remember what you previously said.

Challenge: Even if all those around you give in to the culture, be an example of life lived in the fear of God. It will not only result in your life being blessed, but it will bless those around you.

## 5/17 1 Kings 5:3

*3 “You know that David my father could not build a house for the name of the LORD his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet.*

Solomon was asking the King of Tyre for cedars of Lebanon. These trees are so durable that some of the wood from the Temple Solomon would build is probably at use in the Al Aqsa mosque on the Temple Mount today. It has been carbon dated to the ninth century B.C. The archeological evidence that backs the Biblical accounts is abundant.

Throughout the life of David we have parallels to the Son of David, the Messiah. When we look at the wording of this passage, we are reminded of David’s Psalm 110 that pointed to the Messiah. There, the Eternal God of Israel told the Master to sit at His right hand until His enemies are made His footstool. Then the scepter of the Master would go forth.

Just as David could not build the temple until the enemies of Israel were subdued, so God will not begin the thousand year reign of the Messiah until the enemies of the Messiah are subdued. David did subdue all his enemies before the reign of Solomon. The Son of David will subdue all his enemies at the battle of Armageddon and then begin His reign. There will be rest on every side, and the eternal Temple made of living stones will be completed.

The God of history writes the details in the lives of His people. Scripture is filled with these multiple layers of understanding. We are only scratching the surface. How marvelous is the Word of God!

Consider: Even in eternity the Word will be our guide. Heaven and earth will pass away, but the Word of God will never grow old or useless. It is more durable than the cedars of Lebanon.

## 5/18 1 Kings 8:27

*27 “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!*

Indeed, how could the God that created space, time, and matter be confined to one location? Though God’s manifest presence was over the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place that Solomon built, He was certainly not confined to that location. It was merely a focal point for the people of Israel. It was a picture of what we are to be to God.

There was the outer court where the people came to worship. That is like our body that comes in contact with the world. We present it as a living sacrifice. The bronze altar that received the offerings was in this outer court. There was also the basin for the priests to cleanse themselves before going into the Sanctuary. Our outer life is to be clean if we expect to come before God in service.

The Holy Place had the table of the Presence, and the lampstand as well as the altar of incense. These represent Jesus as the light of our soul. Our thoughts are to be illuminated by His word. Our mind is to be directed by our daily bread, which is the word of God. It is from here that we lift up our prayers like incense on the altar of incense.

Finally, there is the Most Holy Place, where the manifest presence of God dwelt over the Ark of the Covenant. It pictures the spirit within man that is indwelt by God if we know Jesus as our Savior. Yet, God is not confined there. He dwells in all who come to Him by faith. We make up the living Temple. As glorious as Solomon’s temple was, God is making something even more glorious out of you and me.

Consider: The God who inhabits eternity lives in all who accept Jesus by faith!

## 5/19 1 Kings 9:4-5

*4 And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules, 5 then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, ‘You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’*

Did God really ask Solomon to walk before Him as David did? Did God forget the murder and adultery committed by David? Yes, He did. When David repented God did forgive and forget. True repentance is following after God. David may have failed to raise his children in the fear of God, but he certainly got Solomon started on the right path.

Solomon would not remain as steadfast as he was at this great beginning. He would not do all that he did with the awareness that he was under the eyes of a righteous and holy God who would have no other gods before Him. He would disobey the instruction to kings to not have many wives and not multiply horses, trusting in them instead of the Lord. His wives would even turn his heart to foreign gods. And like his father before him, he would fall short in conveying his faith in the Lord to his children.

In spite of all the shortcomings of David and Solomon, a long line of Davidic kings followed for three centuries. Then when the nation went into captivity because of their idolatry, God still preserved the line of David. Records were carefully kept of the line. It was from some of those descendants that a little town called Nazareth was settled. The greatest King of all was born to one of their women, Mary.

Though we are faithless, God is forever faithful. Even when we misunderstand and pray for something far short of His glorious plan, He is faithful to do more than we can ask or imagine. His plan is coming to pass even through fallen people like us.

Reminder: Consider the faithfulness and greatness of God and rejoice!

## 5/20 1 Kings 11:9

*9 And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice …*

Solomon loved foreign women and had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Just as God had warned, they turned his heart to other gods. He even built places of worship for the gods of their countries. Those high places remained around Jerusalem through the reign of many of the kings and eventually led to the downfall of the nation. He was still sacrificing and going through the Jewish rituals, but his heart had turned away from the LORD. After his death, the nation would be torn in two.

How does one’s heart drift away like Solomon’s did even after all the goodness God had showered upon him? God had even appeared to him twice, and still his heart turned away! The LORD deals with us according to what we know, and Solomon certainly knew that there was no god like the LORD. His dedication prayer for the Temple shows he once was sincere in his faith.

David had exemplified for Solomon how to continue after the LORD. David repented when he was found guilty. Solomon allowed his heart to grow proud. He refused to humble himself when the prophet came to tell him God’s edict. It was Solomon who wrote: *“*Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23). And yet he failed to keep his own heart humble before the LORD and sensitive to the word of the LORD.

Consider: Is there some area of your life that is drawing your heart away from the LORD? Are you keeping your heart with all vigilance? Staying sensitive to the Holy Spirit brings conviction and a willingness to cut off anything that draws us away from God.

## 5/21 1 Kings 12:28

*28 So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, “You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”*

The prophet’s words to Solomon came to pass. The ten tribes of the north under Jeroboam’s leadership rebelled against Solomon’s son, Rehoboam. The nation was torn apart from that time forward. To insure that the people no longer went to Jerusalem to worship, he did the same thing his forefathers had done; he built golden calves and declared that these idols had delivered them from Egypt. He even made up their own feast day so the people wouldn’t long for the feasts of the LORD. I wonder if the temple Solomon built for his Egyptian wife had a golden calf as well. Solomon’s compromise had now become a national crisis, one that would not end even unto the captivity of the entire nation.

One compromise led to another and then another until we have the tragic state of such a great nation. God had meant for the nation to be a shining example on the crossroads of the world (Ezekiel 5:5). People were to see the blessing on Israel and be drawn to its God, the creator of heaven and earth. Now God’s chosen people were headed down the path of the nations that God had judged when they came into the land.

Our lives are meant to serve the same purpose as Israel of old. Because of our obedience to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, our joy and peace should be evident to all that we meet, so that they ask us about our faith and the God we serve. But we also have the same temptation that Israel had. One compromise after another can lead us down a path of idolatry and destruction. We can say we are Christians, but if our compromises cost us the joy and peace we once had, why would anyone ask us about the goodness of our God? If we go far enough down that road, we end up just like the northern tribes, making up our own religion, borrowing a little from this one and that, and blending in with the fallen world around us.

Contemplation: Consider what little compromises end in such a great fall.

## 5/22 1 Kings 21:25

*25 There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited.*

The kings of the northern tribes all followed in the idolatrous ways of Jeroboam. Even when prophets would foretell of the demise of their household because of their idolatry, they would continue. Meanwhile in Judah, the great-great-grandson of David, King Asa, restored the faith of his father David. During his long reign, king after king of the north was killed by usurpers. Ahab was one of the worst, but God chose to turn hearts of Judah back to Him during Ahab’s reign.

God even gave Ahab several great victories in battle against much greater odds. But Ahab’s Sidonian wife, Jezebel, incited him to do what was evil. He had witnessed Elijah call down fire from God. He had seen Elijah’s prophesies come to pass. But he allowed his evil wife to be a greater influence than God.

When Elijah predicted the judgment of God upon Ahab, Jezebel, and their entire family, Ahab did something none of the kings of north had done under the same circumstances; He repented in sackcloth and with fasting. There was a believing heart in this most evil of kings. He had allowed bad influences to keep him from doing what his heart knew was right.

Consider: What are you allowing to be the greatest influence in your life?

## 5/23 1 Kings 22:8

*8 And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil.” And Jehoshaphat said, “Let not the king say so.”*

Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, came up to join with Ahab, king of Israel, to fight against their common enemy. False prophets came before them and told them they would be victorious. One of them even made iron horns and as a symbol of the power of Israel and Judah pushing back the enemy. But Jehoshaphat wanted to hear from a prophet of the LORD.

Jehoshaphat asked if there was a prophet of the LORD. Ahab told him that there was, but he hated him because he always prophesied bad things were going to happen to Ahab. Now remember, Ahab had repented in the previous chapter. His long life of sin was catching up with him. Old habits and attitudes are hard to break. Ahab didn’t really want the truth so that he could obey. Even godly Jehoshaphat was not going to listen and change the plan. Their minds were made up.

They called for the prophet Micaiah. At first he prophesied victory. Ahab knew something was not right, so he demanded that Micaiah tell the truth. Micaiah prophesied Ahab’s death. Ahab tried to thwart the prophecy by dressing as a common soldier, but a random arrow struck him between his armor and he died according to the word of the LORD.

Remember: Repentance should include a change in direction and a sensitivity of heart to obey the word of the LORD. When we come to the LORD, we must come with a willingness to heed His word.

## 5/24 2 Kings 2:21

*21 Then he went to the spring of water and threw salt in it and said, “Thus says the LORD, I have healed this water; from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it.”*

The spring of Jericho is near the Dead Sea. The water was most likely like that of the Dead Sea, salty and full of minerals. Every town needed a water source. In Israel, water is life.

Elisha had seen his master Elijah ascend into heaven in a chariot of fire. He had received a double portion of his spirit. He could hear the voice of the Lord. The first test of that anointing came when the local prophets asked him to heal the spring of Jericho. Centuries before, Moses had thrown a log into a well and healed the water (Exodus 15:25). What would Elisha do?

He asked for a new bowl with salt. Who would have guessed he would heal salty water with salt? Of course the salt itself did nothing to the spring and quickly flowed away, but the symbolism stood for what God had done to purify the spring. Salt preserves and keeps decay from starting. I have seen this very spring in Jericho and the water is still fresh and drinkable today.

I wonder what Elisha thought when he heard the Spirit’s instruction. Sometimes the Lord seems to tell us to do the craziest things. But if we obey in faith, we will see that He had His reasons. His ways are not our ways.

Consider: God is always stretching our faith and teaching us to obey His still small voice. Are you ready to do whatever He asks, regardless of how it strange it may seem?

## 5/25 2 Kings 4:43

*43 But his servant said, “How can I set this before a hundred men?” So he repeated, “Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, ‘They shall eat and have some left.’”*

Centuries before Jesus fed the 5,000, Elisha fed the 100. They had received a small gift of food and Elisha told his servant to set it before the men. The servant protested that it was not enough. Perhaps he was even thinking it would cause arguments to break out. But the LORD had told Elisha it would be enough and there would be leftovers, and it was so.

Jesus fed five loaves and two small fish to a crowd of 5,000, while Elisha fed a hundred men with twenty barley loaves and some stalks of grain. A loaf was enough for one person to have a small meal. What is the LORD showing us from these two accounts? The only person to perform more recorded miracles than Elisha was Jesus. We should understand that Jesus is greater than the prophets who came before Him.

We might also see that there is really no comparison to the anointing on the prophets of old and that upon Jesus. It is a completely different scale. While Elisha did raise a dead boy, Jesus raised a dead boy, a dead girl, and a man who had been dead four days. One of the reasons for the abundance of Jesus’ miracles is for us to see that there is none like Him. There is nothing too hard for Him. As the Creator, He can do anything. If you are going to place your faith in someone, look to someone for help, or ask someone for guidance in life, could there be any greater one to ask than Jesus?

Consider: Why would you turn anywhere else in times of need? And if you would turn to Him then, why not turn to Him now simply because of who He is!

## 5/26 2 Kings 5:2-3

*2 Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman’s wife. 3 She said to her mistress, “Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.”*

When a nation would conquer a town on their border, they would take the people they conquered as slaves. A Syrian had taken a child from Israel. This little girl served the wife of Naaman. He was the commander of the Syrian army. In spite of the wickedness of Israel, the prophet Elijah and his successor Elisha had a great impact in turning people back to the true God. This little servant girl had faith in God and His prophets. That translated into a genuine concern for her captor when he contracted leprosy.

The little girl told her mistress how she wished he could go to see Elisha the prophet and be cured. Her faith not only gave her a genuine concern for others, but faith in God’s power to heal. While most of Israel would have wished Naaman to die, she saw him as an individual in need. Israelites may have also doubted that God would even care about a Gentile enemy of Israel. She had faith God not only cared, but desired to heal him. Do we have the faith of this little girl? Do we have the understanding that God cares for even our enemies?

The rest of this story is in *Through the Bible Daily Devotional* (July 6 and 7). Naaman was humbled and healed, and it all went back to a little girl with uncommon faith. She set the whole thing in motion by voicing that faith.

Consider: Watch for opportunities to voice your faith at the leading of the Holy Spirit, even among the people you would least think would receive it. You will never know what God may work through your voice of confidence in our great God.

## 5/27 2 Kings 6:5

*5 But as one was felling a log, his axe head fell into the water, and he cried out, “Alas, my master! It was borrowed.”*

The sons of the prophets had outgrown their living quarters. They asked permission from Elisha to build a bigger dwelling. He told them to go do it, but they insisted that he come with them. While they were felling trees along the muddy Jordan River, one of them lost an axe head in the water. He cried out to Elisha, “It was borrowed.” He most likely did not have the money to replace it.

Elisha did something very unusual. He cut off a stick and threw it in the water where the axe head had fallen. The axe head floated to the surface! He told the man to reach out and grab it.

Does God care about little things like a lost axe head? Apparently He does. Is anything too small a detail to take to the Lord? The son of the prophets could have just thrown up his hands and said, “Oh well, I guess I can’t return it.” Or he could have jumped in the Jordan and tried to feel around in the mud. Instead he looked to the Lord through the prophet to see God’s solution. Elisha did the same. It was surely the Spirit of the Lord that offered such a strange and uncommon solution. Where do you turn when these little crises hit? What is your response to them?

Consider: God cares about even the little things in our life. He has a solution, if we will look to Him. No matter how strange it may seem, follow His direction.

## 5/28 2 Kings 6:33

*33 And while he was still speaking with them, the messenger came down to him and said, “This trouble is from the LORD! Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?”*

The capital of Israel, Samaria, was under siege by the Syrians. It was a long siege and the people of Samaria began to starve. Some were even resorting to cannibalism. The king had put on sackcloth, a sign of repenting, but hid it with outer clothes. He was so distraught and angry with God that he sent a messenger to Elisha with the intent of decapitating him.

The messenger said to Elisha that their circumstances were from God, so why should they wait on God any longer? The king appeared at Elisha’s door with one of his captains, right behind the messenger. Elisha told them that things would return to normal in one day. That was hard to believe, and the captain who was with the King said that even if God opened the windows of heaven it couldn’t happen. Elisha predicted he would see it but not eat it.

God had caused the sound of a great army to strike fear into the hearts of the Syrians who fled in the middle of the night. The tents, their food, and animals were all there for the taking. The gates of the city were opened and people stampeded to the Syrian camp to take the food. In the process, the captain that said it would never happen was trampled to death.

Consider: When circumstances seem as if they couldn’t get worse, we are tempted to become angry with God. His deliverance may be just around the corner and come in a way you never expected. Why should you wait a little longer? It’s because our hope is in the LORD. He’s the only one who can turn things around, and He can do it in an instant.

## 5/29 2 Kings 12:2

*2 And Jehoash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all his days, because Jehoiada the priest instructed him.*

When king Ahaziah died, his mother attempted to kill all the royal family. That means she killed her own grandchildren. The lust for power can compel people to do atrocious things. One of Ahaziah’s sons was hidden and raised without her knowledge. When he was seven-years-old, the priests declared him king and his grandmother, Athaliah, was executed.

Jehoash was faithful to the Lord during his reign, and the reason for that was found in his substitute father, Jehoiada the priest. He taught Jehoash in the ways of the LORD. It was under Jehoash reign that the temple was restored and the idols were removed and destroyed. We should never underestimate the influence of a mentor. That is what every godly parent should be to their children and even as much as possible to their grandchildren. The godly influence of the Jehoiada would span several generations and bless the nation for sixty-nine years.

In spite of his godly reign, Jehoash was assassinated by two of his servants. Because we live a godly life does not mean God will spare us from all tragedy. Just because we meet an unjust end does not mean we are being punished for sin. Jehoash son, Amaziah, would reign after him, and he too would live a godly life like that of his father, and yet be defeated in battle. Don’t be quick to judge others because of calamity in their lives. It may or may not be the result of sin.

Contemplation: Consider the lives of young people that you have the opportunity of influencing. How will you convey faith and trust in the LORD and His word? Do they see you reading your Bible and being in prayer? Sometimes it is more caught than taught. Be intentional about sharing and applying the Bible stories to their lives and sharing how God has met you.

## 5/30 2 Kings 17:7

*7 And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods*

The history of the northern ten tribes is one evil king after another. Treachery and assassination made the average reign of the northern kings a fraction of the reign of the kings of Judah. Though God sent numerous prophets to remind them of God’s promise to send them into exile if they turned to other gods, they would not listen. They became like the nations that that they had expelled when they first entered the land.

The last king of the northern tribes of Israel was Hoshea. The king of Assyria conquered him and took the people into captivity just as God had warned. Only a small number remained in the land alongside those the king of Assyria sent to live there. The people of the land were then called Samaritans.

What was it that had such a powerful attraction that the people of Israel would risk everything? The gods that attracted them were gods that promised prosperity and whose worship involved sexual practices. Man’s heart never changes. From drug runners to inside traders, the lust for material prosperity causes people to risk incarceration. Pornography and sexual perversion comes with its own form of captivity, enslaving the soul and taking over the behavior. Why won’t we as a culture listen to God? Why is the Bible increasingly pushed aside so that we can become like other nations? It is the lust of our fallen hearts, pleasure at any cost with a complete disregard for the consequences. These stories of king after king that did evil in spite of prophet’s warnings and the captivity of the nation are for us to heed today. If we will not learn and refuse to listen to God, we will experience the same fate.

Consider: Nations are changed one heart at a time. Take God’s word to heart. Hear with your whole heart and obey, and you will be blessed (Luke 11:28).

## 5/31 2 Kings 17:17

*17 And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and omens and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger.*

The lust for wealth and sexual promiscuity is not the only thing we have in common with those the northern tribes of Israel. They also practiced infanticide. They did it to gain the favor of gods that would give them abundant harvests. In other words, they did it for financial reasons. While abortion today is not done to offer the fetus to a god, it is often done for financial reasons. The cost to raise a child is considered. The fee for an abortion is only a tiny fraction of that cost.

The abundance the idol worshiper hoped to gain offered them a freedom in life choices. They could possibly support another wife or a servant. They could then be freed up to enjoy the pleasures of life. This is also what some of today’s mothers hope to gain by ending the life of the baby. The baby puts constraints on her freedom, freedom to pursue a spouse, to party, to go to school, etc. In both ancient Israel and today’s society, the baby can be seen as a burden instead of a blessing.

Divinations and omens are common as well. Just a block from the church where I worship are store fronts that invite you in with a promise to tell you your future. Perhaps the most discouraging thing of all is that so many do not see the downward slide of our culture. In a recent TV interview with a psychiatrist on the subject, the psychiatrist actually said the morality of the USA is improving. That only tells me what once was considered immoral by Biblical standards, is now considered moral by the world’s standards. One nearby high school is known for its sexual freedom, the other for its abundant drug use. The story of these northern tribes tells us where this type of behavior will all end.

Prayer: LORD of heaven and earth, open our eyes to the destruction that is taking place from our own hands as we turn from the truth of Scripture to a substitute that is a lie. Wake us up before we pass the point of no return.

June

## 6/1 2 Kings 19:35

*35 And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.*

The king of Assyria, Sennacherib, had conquered the northern tribes and many of the surrounding nations. He next attempted to conquer Jerusalem and its godly king Hezekiah. Sennacherib’s messenger told them to surrender and he would move them to a good land. He told them that none of the gods of the nations could save those nations, and neither would the Israelites’ God be able to save them. He even told them not to trust in lying words that somehow their God could deliver them.

Hezekiah took the message to the LORD and laid it out before Him. He also sent it to the prophet Isaiah. Hezekiah’s prayer pleaded with God to see how Assyria was mocking Him. He asked God to defend Jerusalem for His great name’s sake.

Isaiah came with a message from the LORD. Assyria would neither shoot an arrow nor build a siege ramp. They would leave the way they came, and Sennacherib would die in his own land by his own sword. Our verse today tells of the beginning of the fulfillment of that prophecy. Sennacherib waged war against God, so God sent one angel to deal with him. The Assyrians returned to their land and Sennacherib was assassinated by two of his sons as he worshiped his god.

Nothing is too hard for God. It’s not a good idea to challenge Him. The armies of this world are nothing to Him. When people mock your faith, pray for them. The emperors and officials of Rome that persecuted Christians met an untimely and painful death. Who can stand against our great God, maker of heaven and earth?

Consider: What confidence and peace we should have knowing the greatness of our God!

## 6/2 2 Kings 20:5

*5 “Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the leader of my people, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD,*

God warned Hezekiah through the prophet Isaiah that he was about to die. Hezekiah pleaded with God with tears for a longer life. God granted him fifteen more years and promised to keep Jerusalem from being conquered. God even gave him reassurance that it would happen by a sign. The shadow of the sun moved backward ten steps.

Sometimes we are given extra time. Perhaps it is an answer to prayer or the intervention of a doctor that is at the right place at the right time with the specific knowledge of what one needs. What will we do with that extra time?

Hezekiah grew proud (2Chronicles 32:25). He showed the emissaries from Babylon all his treasure which would incite a future conquest of Judah by Babylon. He fathered a son that would be one of the worst kings in Judah’s history. God tested him to reveal what was in his heart, and Hezekiah again humbled himself before the Lord.

Consider: Every day is a gift from God. We can use it wisely and focus on eternity, or we can become wrapped up in the things of this world and the pride of life. What are you doing with the time God has given you?

## 6/3 2 Kings 21:6

*6 And he burned his son as an offering and used fortune-telling and omens and dealt with mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger.*

God had proclaimed Hezekiah to be the godliest king of Judah (2Kings 18:5). His son Manasseh was the wickedest. Manasseh replaced the altars on the high places. He put altars to the gods of heaven in the Temple. And as our verse today tells us, he burned his son as an offering. Along with that atrocious act is mentioned what so many take lightly today; he used fortune tellers and mediums. This is a sin God takes very seriously. It is seeking direction from the evil spiritual realm. The spirits of the godly will not tell you what you want to hear because they know you should seek God. If we will not seek God, demonic spirits will gladly direct us.

Manasseh reigned 55 years! It was one of the longest reigns in the history of Israel. There are two very difficult facts for us to face. The first is that our children will not always choose to follow our faith. The other is that the wicked often live a long and prosperous life. We might prefer it was otherwise, but we are not God. God loves us enough to not force Himself on anyone. Each person must decide for himself or herself if he or she will surrender to His love.

A long reign of an evil king may be giving the people he rules over exactly what they desire. God sees the hearts of men. We can trust that His choice is best, even when it means to shorten the life of the godly, or extend the life of the wicked. There must be freedom to choose even for our children. A forced faith is not faith at all. Instead of becoming angry with God, we should see that the real cause of suffering is sin in the world. The gift of free choice is a double-edged sword.

Consider: The case of Manasseh shows us that things are not always what we would desire. We must trust God and personally be the man or woman He has called us to be.

## 6/4 1 Chronicles 10:13

*13 So Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the LORD in that he did not keep the command of the LORD, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance.*

The books of Chronicles were written upon the return of the Jews to their land. They were careful to give the lineage of the people so that they would know their heritage. It was especially important to record the line of David, for it was from David that the Messiah was to come. While going over the same history that was covered in the books of the Kings, they give us some additional details.

In a recent devotion, I shared with you about the death of the godly king, Josiah, and that we can’t always say an untimely death is because of some evil in the person’s life. Our verse today goes back to the first king of Israel, King Saul, and tells us that his death was indeed because of his sins against God.

We find the same thing in the New Testament. Jesus sometimes indicated that no one was at fault for a person’s physical ailment. He said a man was born blind so that the glory of God might be revealed (John 9:3). Another time he told a man he had healed to not sin again or a worse problem would befall him (John 5:14). It is not for us to judge. We must leave that in the hand of God. By shortening their lives God may be sparing the godly from a future that would be worse. He may be ready to judge the wicked and end their miserable life. Only God can see the heart and knows all the circumstances in a person’s life. Leave all judgment to Him.

Prayer: LORD of heaven and earth, all-knowing God, help me to focus on living a godly life and leave all judging of souls to You. You alone see the heart of man. Help my heart be submitted to Yours at all times.

## 6/5 1 Chronicles 11:22

*22 And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was a valiant man of Kabzeel, a doer of great deeds. He struck down two heroes of Moab. He also went down and struck down a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen.*

King David had a group of mighty men who were his elite forces. This chapter tells of the amazing deeds that made them famous. We all have a gift from God, and these men were gifted at warfare. Imagine the courage it would take to jump into a snowy pit with a lion! Benaiah became the head of David’s bodyguards. You could say that in protecting David he was protecting the future Messiah that was to come from David.

At that time, the nation of Israel was a monarchy. It was influenced by direct revelation of God through the prophets and priests. God used them to judge the inhabitants of the land. Israel was at the trade crossroads of the world (Ezekiel 5:5). As God blessed and directed them, the nations of the world would inquire about the God of Israel. But as we have seen, when the Israelites became as wicked as those they had removed, they had to be removed. They were only an example of the judgment on those who refuse to listen to God.

The parallel for today is that each of us has the opportunity to be in a relationship with God. The peace and joy that others see in us, because of our relationship and obedience to Jesus, may cause them to inquire about our God. But the warning is also for us. If we refuse to listen, the consequences of sin in our life will be an example of the judgment of God. We all have the same choice Israel had. Some will even make a name for themselves by doing amazingly courageous things at the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: LORD, help me to always have a heart to listen and obey. If You have planned some mighty deed, give me the courage to do it. Help me persevere until I stand in Your presence.

## 6/6 1 Chronicles 12:18

*18 Then the Spirit clothed Amasai, chief of the thirty, and he said, “We are yours, O David, and with you, O son of Jesse! Peace, peace to you, and peace to your helpers! For your God helps you.” Then David received them and made them officers of his troops.*

During the time in which David was hiding in the wilderness from Saul, men from Saul’s own tribe defected to David. One of them, Amasai, became a leader among David’s mighty men. When they found David and asked to join his ranks, David told them that if they had come in friendship, his soul would be bound to theirs. Then he warned them that if they had come in treachery, God would deal with them.

Our passage today is Amasai’s response. The Spirit came upon Amasai to help him answer. Before Pentecost the Spirit did not continually indwell man but came upon them for a time. He declared his allegiance to David and pronounced peace upon him and his helpers. Why? “For your God helps you.” Amasai recognized the hand of God upon David. He had heard of David’s defeat of Goliath, his exploits in battle, and his escape from and evasion of the king. He wanted to be where God was blessing. He knew God’s side is the winning side.

Do you know someone that God helps? Perhaps you see an anointing to sing the right song at the right time, or to share a verse that perfectly fits the situation, or give godly advice in a timely way. It may be an anointed sermon week after week, or the wisdom that knows what action to take in every situation. Whatever it is, you see that God is helping him or her. The person God helps makes a great ally.

You can be that person if you will continually look to God and follow His leading. If you will receive His help, and do so consistently, not looking to your own wisdom or strength, but God’s, then it will be true of you. You’ll find other’s follow you for the same reason Amasai followed David.

Prayer: LORD, help me to recognize the godly people around me, those that receive Your help. Help me to always look to You and not trust in my own strength or natural insight. Give me ears to hear Your heart.

## 6/7 1 Chronicles 15:13

*13 Because you did not carry it the first time, the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not seek him according to the rule.”*

When David united the kingdom his desire was to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem where he was going to reign. God had not yet shown the nation where He desired it to be kept. King Saul had not inquired of the ark, but King David wanted to be sure he was obedient to God. On the first attempt to bring it, Uzzah touched the ark to steady it and was struck dead. This angered David. Why would God strike someone dead when David was only seeking to please God?

Our passage explains part of the reason. (See *Through the Bible Daily Devotional* (May 28) for more.) They were not carrying the ark according to God’s direction. Instead, they had chosen an easier way, the way the Philistines had sent it to them, on a cart. God’s instructions were ignored.

We might think, “What’s the difference, on a cart or on poles that men carry?” But God gave us His word for our good and to teach us about spiritual things. The ark is the throne of God. It is most holy and was a picture of God’s grand plan of redeeming man. The blood of atonement would come between God’s presence over the mercy seat (the lid) and the Law inside the ark that condemns us. David was unintentionally making light of this glorious plan, the very reason he could be forgiven of his sins.

Zeal for God is not enough. We need the instruction of the Word to understand the will of God. Our neglect of the Word can result in severe loss. It is given to us for our good to instruct us in the way of truth.

Consider: Zeal for God must be accompanied by the boundaries of the Word of God if we are to serve God in a way that is pleasing to Him.

## 6/8 1 Chronicles 17:13-14

*13 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, 14 but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.’”*

The author of Hebrews teaches us that this prophecy is about Jesus. This was the prophecy that Nathan gave to David when David desired to build a house for the Ark of the Covenant. God responded by promising to build a house for David, that is, He was telling David one of His descendants would reign forever. This descendant would be obedient to God, unlike King Saul. God will never have to remove His love from Jesus because of sin.

The house and kingdom are the people of God whom Jesus, also known as the son of David and Son of God, will reign over. His kingdom will never end, for we are given eternal life. We will forever gladly yield ourselves to His beneficent reign. The cycle we have seen, of Israel sinning and being judged, will be no more. That is because God will perfect us so that we no longer are deceived by sin.

What a glorious day that will be! We enter it now when we yield ourselves to the will of God. That is when we experience His peace and blessing on our lives. That peace and the presence of the Holy Spirit within is a deposit guaranteeing what will be when this prophecy comes to its fullness (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Consider: Are you experiencing the reign of the Son of God over your life?

## 6/9 1 Chronicles 22:5

*5 For David said, “Solomon my son is young and inexperienced, and the house that is to be built for the LORD must be exceedingly magnificent, of fame and glory throughout all lands. I will therefore make preparation for it.”So David provided materials in great quantity before his death.*

David was not allowed to build the Temple because of all the blood he had shed in warfare. God would give his son a peaceful reign in which to build it. But David knew that if it was to be a house for the Creator, it must be exceedingly magnificent. So David began amassing all the gold, silver, bronze, timber and stone that would be required to build it.

Today, those who have received Jesus as the Lord of their life are the temple of God. God prepared us by making a way for us to receive His sanctifying Spirit (Titus 3:5; 1Peter 1:2). It is the Spirit of God that is at work refining us and shaping us to be that exceedingly magnificent temple that is fit to be the dwelling of God.

When you look at the church today, you may wonder if the work will ever be completed. Indeed, if we look at ourselves we may wonder if the Spirit will ever be done with us. But we know the Master Craftsman who anointed the builders of the Temple Solomon built is more than capable of finishing what He starts.

Don’t be discouraged if it seems to be taking a long time. When we see Him face to face the work will be finished in an instant. Every stone will fit with every other stone. There will be complete unity. Nothing will be out of place as is so often the case today. Nothing will defile this temple, for God will see to that (Revelation 21:27).

Reminder: Remember to keep the vision for yourself and for others. The person you are upset with today will one day be God’s glorious work of art.

## 6/10 2 Chronicles 2:6

*6 But who is able to build him a house, since heaven, even highest heaven, cannot contain him? Who am I to build a house for him, except as a place to make offerings before him?*

Solomon had the right idea. God is bigger than the universe. He made the universe! So how could you possibly build him a house? And who in the world would be up to the task of building a house for the eternal Creator? Solomon had a clear understanding that God was bigger and more magnificent than any created thing. The best he could hope to accomplish with a structure is a place for the altar and the Ark of the Covenant. It was over the Ark of the Covenant that the Shechinah Glory was seen. It was a ball of light that represented the presence of God and yet God is everywhere throughout time right now.

Solomon built what was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It contained 7,500,000 pounds of gold. The best artisans of the day did the metal and stone work. It was dazzling, and yet it did not do justice. It would take God Himself to build a house that does Him justice. The marvel is that He’s building it out of the flawed material of you and me. It just shows the greatness of God to transform ordinary things into something extraordinary. We can’t imagine how wonderful the finished product will be. It will be the great wonder of all time.

Consider: Are you yielding to the Craftsman’s hand today? Is your life a living offering?

## 6/11 2 Chronicles 6:9

*9 Nevertheless, it is not you who shall build the house, but your son who shall be born to you shall build the house for my name.*

As with many of the prophetic passages in the Scriptures, this promise had multiple meanings. In the last devotion we saw that the Temple was a foreshadowing of what God intended to do in making a temple up of living stones, which is all who believe in Jesus. The earthly Temple was built by Solomon, a son of David. The temple of living stones is built by Jesus, a son of David.

We are often misdirected by thinking that a program or a method will build the temple. Jesus told Peter, “I will build my church.” (Matthew 16:18) Certainly, God can work through us to point others to Christ, but the church is built by Him. He is the One who draws people. He is the One who shapes us. He is the One who places us where we should be for our growth and the growth of those He places in fellowship with us.

I’ve been to a number of church growth conferences, but never heard anyone declare the truth of this prophecy and of Jesus’ words. Man always thinks that he can do something with his bright ideas. Then, if he is successful, who gets the glory? As Solomon declared, “Who is able to build Him a house?” Certainly, only Jesus is capable of building a house magnificent enough for Almighty God.

Consider: The only real church-growth plan is to allow the Lord to use you. Be sensitive to His Spirit and obey Him, and you will see the church grow.

## 6/12 2 Chronicles 11:16

*16 And those who had set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came after them from all the tribes of Israel to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the LORD, the God of their fathers.*

Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, reigned over the tribal areas of Judah and Benjamin. Jeroboam reigned over the northern nine tribes. The Levites were forced from their ancestral lands and moved to the southern kingdom. Along with them came people from other tribes who held to the worship of the God of Israel. They heeded the warnings from the prophets for three years.

It would have been a difficult choice to leave your kin and your land and move to the land owned by another tribe. These people that did so put God above all else. We are challenged to do the same thing today as our culture turns away from the God of our fathers. Is He more important than security and ease? That is what we must ask ourselves. Will we follow Him regardless of the cost?

Sadly, Rehoboam only worshiped the true God for three years. He then began to worship other gods and all Israel did so with him. It appears that those who left their homes in the north were following the king and not the Lord. To wake them up and turn them from their wickedness, God sent the king of Egypt

against them.

Consider: We can appear to be doing the right thing but be doing it with the wrong motivation. The Lord sees our hearts. Why do you worship the Lord? Is it because others do? Is it because someone you respect does? Faith must become your own or you will be swayed by others.

## 6/13 2 Chronicles 12:8

*8 Nevertheless, they shall be servants to him, that they may know my service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries.”*

When Sheshak, king of Egypt, came against the southern kingdom of Israel, a prophet told the people that they had forsaken God so He had forsaken them. Rehoboam and all the people repented and turned back to God. God promised they would not be destroyed, but that they would have to learn a lesson. The service of God is much lighter than the service that man requires. Sheshak would make them serve him by exacting a yearly tribute.

Jesus picked up this theme in the gospels. He invites us to come to Him and learn that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). We will all serve sin or be freed from sin to serve Jesus. Some people are like Rehoboam. They get tired of serving God and they decide they will serve themselves, not realizing that yoke becomes much heavier than God’s yoke.

Whom are you serving? The only ones that are truly free are those that serve the Lord. It sounds like a contradiction, but He transforms our will so that we desire the same things that He desires. What we once desired is a product of our fallen nature. It is not who we were created to be. It is a deceptive and destructive mindset. The Spirit of God renews our mind through the Word of God so that our thinking is transformed and the result is the freedom to joyfully serve God. That is why Jesus’ yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Consider: How heavy is the yoke you are wearing?

## 6/14 2 Chronicles 15:7

*7 But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded.”*

The prophet Azariah spoke these words to godly King Asa. Asa had just been successful against a far-superior force, but he was not courageous enough to confront the idolatry going on all around him by his own people. Asa’s father, Abijah, set the bad example of not removing the idols from the land. That is why God had allowed there to be wars and trouble, to turn them back to worship Him alone. When King Asa heard this prophecy, he did take courage. He decided to deal with all the idolatry his father tolerated. He even removed his mother from her position because she was an idolater, and he crushed and burned her idol.

The word of the prophet gave him the courage to do what his father had not done. The people of the entire southern kingdom committed themselves to serving the LORD alone. What great results from this word of encouragement from the LORD! But isn’t this true for all of us? If we seek the LORD with our whole hearts and do not fear what others think, if we give God our all in doing what we know is His will, won’t He reward our work as well? Of course He will!

First we must take courage. Not only will the godly back us when we do what is right, but the LORD will bless our efforts. We will face opposition, and should not allow ourselves to slack off because of it. We must be courageous. God is with us, so we should not fear. The reward might not be as obvious as it was for King Asa, but God will reward us. He is faithful and just.

Consider: Are there things around you that you know are wrong, and yet you have silently put up with them? Perhaps God is speaking to you through the words of the prophet. Take courage! Don’t let your hands be weak. Your work will be rewarded.

## 6/15 2 Chronicles 18:3

*3 Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, “Will you go with me to Ramoth-gilead?” He answered him, “I am as you are, my people as your people. We will be with you in the war.”*

What a beautiful declaration! Well, it sounds beautiful. Actually, good King Jehoshaphat was aligning himself and Judah with one of the wickedest kings of the northern tribes, Ahab. The north was given over to idolatry. How could Jehoshaphat declare them to be one people?

Ahab called for his prophets of Baal and they all said he would be victorious in a war against Syria. Jehoshaphat asked for at least one prophet of YHWH. The prophet of YHWH said Ahab would die in battle. Still, Jehoshaphat went ahead with the plan. Why ask God if you aren’t going to listen? Even worse, Ahab convinced Jehoshaphat to dress like a king, while he dressed as a common soldier. I guess they were trying to trick God. What was Jehoshaphat thinking? Did he feel he had to stay true to that ridiculous statement of being one with the north?

The Syrians went after Jehoshaphat until they saw he was not Ahab. Then they turned away. A stray arrow hit Ahab right between the pieces of his armor and he died in his chariot later that day, just as the prophet predicted.

Consider: Be careful to not be overly generous with your words, especially with the ungodly. If you realize you are going the wrong direction, apologize for your words and obey God. Jehoshaphat was later rebuked by a prophet for helping the wicked (2 Chronicles 19:2).

## 6/16 2 Chronicles 24:20

*20 Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, “Thus says God, ‘Why do you break the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.’”*

You can hear the heartfelt cry of God in the prophetic call of Zechariah: “Why do you break the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper?” How God longed for them to be faithful so that He might bless them. He is like a father with children that continue in disobedience and must be punished to turn them from danger. Why? The seduction of the false promises of gods that are no gods drew them away from the true God time after time. When would they learn from their history?

We can ask ourselves the same question. God wants to bless our lives, but if discipline would turn us toward Him and cause us to rely upon Him, then we must be disciplined. The warning we hear at the end of the verse is ominous. If we forsake Him, He will forsake us. In other words, God will lift His hand of protection and we will face life without His guidance and care. We will be like sheep without a shepherd.

The hearts of the southern kingdom were so hardened that not only did they refuse to listen, but they stoned Zechariah for being the messenger of truth. Let us not be angry with the messengers that would warn us when we are busy serving other gods, but heed their plea to repent.

Prayer: LORD, please give us ears to hear Your word and Your messengers that speak Your word. Keep our hearts sensitive to Your correction that we might prosper. Help us to keep our hearts wholly devoted to You

## 6/17 2 Chronicles 29:36

*36 And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced because God had prepared for the people, for the thing came about suddenly.*

Ahaz was one of the wicked kings of Judah. He closed up the temple of God, destroyed many of its instruments, built altars to other gods, and made metal idols upon which he sacrificed his sons. God brought about a great defeat of the nation. They were almost completely crushed and helpless against their enemies.

After Ahaz’ death, his son Hezekiah reigned. Hezekiah began a great reform. He opened the temple, instructed the priests to clean out all the idols and repair what was damaged, and also reinstituted the sacrifices. He removed the altars his father had built. The entire nation turned back to God. It was an overnight transformation of the nation. Hezekiah even invited the northern tribes to join in the Passover celebration. It was a Passover that topped all those since the time of Solomon.

This godly king stood for righteousness and called the nation to understand that their idolatry had caused God to lift His hand of protection. Never underestimate the power of God through a person completely submitted to Him. Hezekiah would be the last great king that ushered in one final time of blessing before the nation was judged.

Prayer: LORD, though it seems to man that such a thing could never happen in our nation, would You please raise up such an instrument in our day.

## 6/18 2 Chronicles 31:4

*4 And he commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites, that they might give themselves to the Law of the LORD.*

Part of Hezekiah’s reform was to see that the Levites received the support that the Law of the Lord commanded to be given them. Since they had not been given a territory like the other tribes, and because they gave a portion of their time to the Temple service, they were to be supported by the offerings of the people. The evil kings had caused that practice to cease.

Even today there are those who suggest that full-time ministers in service of the church should be supported by another occupation. Apparently there were those in the New Testament church that made the same suggestion. Hezekiah and Paul give the reason for the financial support, “that they might give themselves to the Law of the LORD.”(1Corinthians 9:13-14) At the end of the chapter (verse 20), this action of Hezekiah is called “good and right and faithful before the LORD his God.”

Peter had deacons appointed to deal with practical concerns for this very reason. The apostles were to be devoted to the Word of God and prayer (Acts 6:4). Though today’s pastors do not function as priests, we are still in need of those who will give themselves to God’s Word. Certainly we should all spend time in God’s Word and study it faithfully, but these who minister the Word to the body must be free to devote themselves fully to it. That is good, right, and faithful before the LORD.

Consider: Does your pastor have the support he needs, both financially and in practical matters, so that he can devote himself to the Word of God and prayer?

## 6/19 2 Chronicles 32:7-8

*7 “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. 8 With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” And the people took confidence from the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.*

The odds against us can seem overwhelming. They certainly seemed that way to the people of Judah. Assyria had conquered all the nations around them, including the northern tribes of Israel. But Hezekiah listened to the LORD. When you get God’s perspective, everything changes. God does not see as man sees. One plus God is a majority in any battle.

Hezekiah’s advice is good for anyone that is in the LORD’S service and fighting for His cause. Be strong! Don’t let the psychological warfare of man or Satan claim a foothold in your mind. Be courageous! In recent history, two men were on their way to their execution for being believers when one said to the other, “Play the man!” Don’t be afraid! God is with us and we know He can turn the tables in a moment. When you have angel armies with you, you easily outnumber your opponent.

The ungodly rely on flesh, carnal strength or wisdom. God is easily mightier and wiser than all men that have ever lived put together. If you are relying on Him, you can know the final outcome will be favorable, whether you win or lose the battle. The battle isn’t the final thing. Do you trust the LORD? That is what matters. Are you taking confidence from the words of Scripture? One angel came and devastated Assyria’s army in a single night.

Consider: What are you facing? Does it look impossible? Are you afraid you will never be able to accomplish what God has called you to do? Be strong and courageous! If God is with you, who can be against you? Listen, obey, and watch Him work wonders.

## 6/20 2 Chronicles 32:25

*25 But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem.*

Hezekiah was dying when the prophet told him God heard his cries and would extend his life fifteen years. During those extra years Hezekiah showed his great treasures to emissaries from Babylon. Things began to unravel. It was the pride in his heart that led him to do that. He did repent and humbled himself.

Our verse today warns us that when God has blessed a life with special grace and mercy, He expects a return in accordance with those blessings. God had spared the nation from its fallen condition, renewed their power and wealth, miraculously healed Hezekiah and extended his life. What should the response have been? It should certainly not have been a prideful heart that went its own way.

What has God done for you? Has He blessed you with salvation? He’s given you His Word to guide you. Think of all He has personally done for you. Count your blessings. What would be the appropriate response to all the blessings you have received? One thing is for certain; it should not be to say that what we have was obtained by our own power or clever thinking. Let us humbly acknowledge that every good thing we have is from the gracious goodness of God (James 1:17).

Prayer: LORD, keep my heart humble before You. Keep me from going my own way in pride. Help me to always acknowledge before all that every blessing I have been given is from Your gracious hand.

## 6/21 2 Chronicles 33:13

*13 He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.*

Manasseh would probably win the distinction of being the wickedest king of Israel. He was born to Hezekiah during those added years of life. As soon as he became king, he undid everything his father had accomplished. He restored idolatry to a new level of depravity. He defiled the temple. He burned his sons as offerings to idols. He used fortune-tellers, sorcerers, mediums, and necromancers. The depravity of Judah was worse than the nations that God expelled from the land.

Babylon came and conquered the land and took Manasseh captive. That is what it took to wake him up and turn him back to the God of his fathers. That was when he finally prayed. It must have been a prayer of deep repentance. You can never be too bad for God. The mercy of God is there for anyone who will turn. Manasseh had led God’s people into the darkest depravity, yet even then, God was willing to hear his prayer of repentance.

Babylon let him return to his position as king. Now Manasseh knew that the LORD was God. He immediately showed that his repentance was genuine by destroying all the idols and their altars and restoring the worship of God in the temple. His previous sins would have consequences for the nation, but his heart had been changed.

No matter how far you have fallen, remember that God is a God of mercy. Those who genuinely repent and turn to Him will be received. They will show their repentance is genuine by cleaning up their life. The sins of the past will be abhorrent to them. Though we may face the consequences of our sins, we will know the LORD is God, that He hears our prayers, and that we have been made right in His eyes.

Consider: The person you think would never turn to God can’t be as bad as Manasseh. God brings people to places of desperation so they will know He is the LORD.

## 6/22 Ezra 1:5

*5 Then rose up the heads of the fathers’ houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem.*

The prophet Jeremiah had predicted the captivity would last for 70 years (Jeremiah 29:10). Persia conquered Babylon. At the end of the 70 years, the Persian king Cyrus issued a decree for all who desired to return and to give offerings to finance and labor to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. God had promised centuries earlier that when they forsook Him and went into exile, if they would return to Him and seek Him, then He would bring them back to the land (Deuteronomy 30:1-5).

The northern tribes had been integrated into other cultures, but the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi had clung to the promises and longed to return. It was in answer to their prayers and the faithfulness of God to keep His word that the decree went out.

Not everyone returned at once. God stirred the hearts of those He chose to rebuild the temple. Some had grown successful in their exile and had no desire to leave. It is the same today with the church, the people of God. Some long to see the temple of living stones grow and be completed, while others are content with success in this world. God stirs the hearts of some to be evangelists and pastors and teachers that the temple might be built up of living stones. Some would return at a later time, and some families would return even hundreds of years after the edict. Everything must be in God’s time.

Consider: Is God stirring your heart? How can you help to build the temple of living stones today? It may be to build a friendship with a neighbor to earn the opportunity to share your story and lead them to Christ. It may be to disciple a young believer, or to hold up the weary arms of some servant of the Lord. When God stirs you in a specific direction, respond with your whole heart.

## 6/23 Ezra 4:12

*12 be it known to the king that the Jews who came up from you to us have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations.*

As the remnant of Jews that returned began to rebuild Jerusalem, the surrounding inhabitants asked if they could help. They said they had been worshiping the same God and wanted to be a part of the renewed worship. The Jews saw through their subterfuge and refused their help. We will often be faced with those that have good ideas for the church, but they don’t have a relationship with the LORD. Their ideas are for their own benefit in one way or another.

Their neighbors then showed their true colors by writing the king and accusing the Jews of treason. Consider the hypocrisy. One minute they want to help you, and the next they accuse you of treason. This is normal for the world. They can’t understand the things of God and so they will try every avenue to attack you. They even hired counselors to try to frustrate the Jews. Their main tools against them were fear and discouragement. Nothing has changed.

God gives us the freedom to serve Him or oppose Him. Those in His service will inevitably face that opposition from others. The LORD repeatedly tells us, “Do not fear!” Know that God is on the throne of heaven, and He is laughing at those who oppose Him. Frustration and discouragement may come, but they will only serve to strengthen your character and make you even more appreciative when the work is completed.

The work did stop for quite some time. When they began to rebuild the temple the locals complained to the new king. He not only discovered the records that approved the building of the Temple, but also found out that his kingdom was supposed to fund it. He commanded the opposition to give their tax money to the Jews to pay for the materials (Ezra 6:8).

Consider: When we are frustrated and discouraged that the work of the LORD has slowed or stopped, God may have something even better in mind for the future. His plans can’t be stopped. Take courage! Look forward in confident faith!

## 6/24 Nehemiah 1:8-9

*8 Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, 9 but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’*

Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king of Persia. He had heard that the remnant in Jerusalem was not doing well. The walls of the city were broken down and the gates had been burned. That allowed access to thieves and marauders. This troubled him greatly, so he wept, fasted, and prayed for days confessing his sins and those of his people. In prayer, he recalled the greatness and faithful goodness of God to those who love Him and keep His commands. He recalled the warning of Moses that they would be scattered if they were unfaithful. But then he recalled the promise of returning them to the land if they would return to Him and keep His commandments. Nehemiah was presenting his plea on the basis of the Word of God. He was about to make a request to the king, and the Word of God gave him courage to act on what God was putting in his heart.

When we are seeking the will of God, we, too, should look to God’s Word to see if we are acting according to God’s will. We can pray the Scriptures. This is not to convince God, but to reassure our hearts that what we are asking lines up with His desires. Doing so emboldens our faith and gives us the courage to step out and act according to what God has put in our heart.

Consider: Consider taking a moment even now to search your heart and see what God is prompting you to do. Is the action supported by the Word? Then pray that Scripture just as Nehemiah did and go forward expecting God to respond.

## 6/25 Nehemiah 4:7

*7 But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry.*

Nehemiah had received permission from the king to go to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. After arriving in the city and surveying the damage, he gathered the people and shared the vision and how God had helped him. They began to rebuild the walls. Most were building the section that was closest to their home. This assured they would do the best they could so that their own home would be safe.

When the surrounding people saw the wall half completed, they decided to attack and confuse the workers. Earlier they had claimed Nehemiah was committing treason. Now they are doing the very thing they accused him of, for the rebuilding was done with the king’s permission. It is amazing how history is repeated. Thousands of years later, Arabs are still resisting Jews building in Jerusalem.

Just as when they began to rebuild the temple, we see that those opposed to the things of God will resist any progress of God’s people. If the Jews had just settled for the status quo, they would have left them alone. If God’s people do not move forward in doing God’s will, you most likely won’t face resistance. Those who would attempt to attack and confuse you do so at the prompting of the prince of this world. Being attacked is often a sign that you are accomplishing something of value. The apostle Paul wrote that everyone who lives a godly life will be persecuted (2Timothy 3:12).

Consider: If you are going to accomplish anything for God’s kingdom, expect opposition, but know God will give you wisdom and see you through.

## 6/26 Nehemiah 5:15

*15 The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God.*

The people that had returned to Jerusalem had to pay hefty taxes each year. Some of them had to mortgage their land and even sold their daughters into servitude to remain there. In addition, they were spending much of their time helping to build the city wall. Nehemiah saw their hardship. Instead of demanding an increased tax to cover his expenses of feeding his servants and dignitaries that came, he met the need on his own.

He was not like the governors that came before him. He and his servants worked alongside the people. They did not take advantage of their authority, but rather used it to serve the people. This is exactly what Jesus did. He said that He had come to serve and not to be served (Mark 10:45). If anyone had the right to be served and make demands on others, it is our Creator. Instead He showed us the right way to lead, just as Nehemiah did. It was consistent with Jesus’ teaching that the greatest among you will be your servant (Matthew 23:11). It is having a heart for those in need.

Nehemiah prayed that God would remember his sacrifice. He believed that God rewards those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). He knew that in the end, it was better to live in the fear of God, trusting God to reward him for the sacrifices he was making.

Consider: We are all granted some authority in one way or another in our life. Let us follow the example of Nehemiah and Jesus and use it to serve others, knowing that our reward is in heaven.

## 6/27 Nehemiah 8:17

*17 And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing.*

The walls were completed and the people heard the books of Moses read and explained to them. It was the time of year for the Feast of Booths. There is a confession in our verse for today. Israel had ignored God’s command to celebrate the Feast of Booths each year at the appointed time. How could a nation whose laws were all based on a book completely neglect one of the key commands in the book for centuries? Perhaps that was a factor in their backsliding and resultant captivity.

When they did what they had long neglected, there was very great rejoicing. When we do what we know is the will of God, our hearts are not only at peace, but filled with great joy. The feast recalls their deliverance from Egypt and their wandering in the wilderness living in temporary homes until they reached the Promised Land. They had just returned again by the gracious hand of God and needed to remember again how God miraculously delivered them.

Every Christian today needs to spend time recalling his or her deliverance as well. If we forget the day that Jesus washed our sins away, if we do not celebrate it occasionally, our relationship with the Lord begins to grow cold. In the process we miss the great joy He intends for us to possess. We can slip again into the captivity of the sin from which we were once delivered. Don’t miss opportunities to tell about and relive the day you were saved. Celebrate it!

Consider: We remember the day we are born into this world with a party. Shouldn’t we be even more celebratory when we recall the day we were born again?

## 6/28 Esther 9:22

*22 as the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor.*

So often we worry about something that will never come to pass. Worry is really a lack of trust in God. Certainly the Jews were concerned about the plot to destroy them so they fasted and prayed. They put their trust in God. Esther did what she could at the risk of her life, but the numerous coincidences were all in the hand of God. The very day the Jews were to be annihilated throughout the Persian kingdom, God turned the tables and instead it was their enemies that were killed. What man meant for evil, God turned around and used to bless His people.

When fear strikes at our hearts, we need to do exactly what they did. Look to God first. Look to His providential provision. Then trust Him for the rest. Mordacai knew that God would raise up deliverance one way or another (Esther 4:14). We place our trust in God. We ask for His help. We do what He has set before us, and then we watch Him work. When we look back on our former circumstances, we will wonder why we were so anxious.

The Feast of Purim is celebrated to this day in Israel. As the nations around them look for ways to destroy them, just as Haman did, the Jews are reminded of God’s ability to turn the tables. Let us who are grafted in remember that the same is true for us. The Lord is our keeper (Psalm 121:5).

Consider: The vast majority of times we worried were a fruitless exercises in a lack of trust in God. The next time we are tempted to worry, let us remember to look to God with confident trust.

## 6/29 Job 2:13

*13 And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.*

When calamity struck Job, his three closest friends came to console him. At first they did the right thing; except for their weeping with him, they were silent (Job 13:5). What can you say to a person whose children were killed? Of all Job’s losses, that had to be the most painful. His physical affliction only added to it.

Then they began to offer suggestions. They started advising him to confess his hidden sin. They did not know that this was a heavenly battle between Satan and God. None of them guessed that what was going on had its source in the heavenly realm. Silence and weeping with him would have been their best gift, but their advice only added to his pain. He had already searched his heart. He knew he wasn’t perfect, but he also knew this was not punishment from the hand of God.

When we go to comfort our friends in need, remember that advice in a time of pain can sometimes merely add to the pain. The best comfort you can give is merely to be there to weep with them and to pray for the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Consider: There is still a heavenly war raging over the souls of men. Just as God allowed Job to be tested and refined, so we may be tested as well. The silent comfort of the concerned presence of a friend and his or her prayers can mean more than any words could express. We may not understand what God allows, but we can trust His heart.

## 6/30 Job 5:17-18

*17 “Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty. 18 For he wounds, but he binds up; he shatters, but his hands heal.*

Although Job’s friends were wrong in their assumptions, there is truth in much of what they spoke. The first friend, Eliphaz, said that all men have sinned. He knew God was just. In our verses today we see that he knew God’s discipline was a blessing. The hope of God’s restoration came to fruition in Job. However, he did not understand that in some cases a person’s afflictions are for purposes unseen. Eliphaz was wise, but he lacked discernment.

We are blessed when God reproves us. It is often to turn us back to the right path. It can be God’s natural consequences or His supernatural intervention, but either way, we are being turned from our destructive ways or, as in Job’s case, brought into a deeper relationship with our Creator. One thing did apply to Job. He despised these afflictions. You can hardly blame him, but still, it was a lack of trust in God.

God does wound and bind up. He does shatter and His hands heal. All things serve His purposes. No matter what our condition, we can know that God can deliver and restore us if it is for our good and His glory. Some believe it is always God’s will to be physically whole, but that may not be what is best for us. If our affliction keeps us close to the Lord, and our healing would cause us to drift away, which is better?

Consider: God places a higher priority on our eternal state than our temporal condition.

July

## 7/1 Job 6:9

*9 that it would please God to crush me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off!*

Job despaired of life. His children were dead. His wife told him to just curse God and die. His wealth was stolen and he was suffering physically for some time. His friends blamed it all on some hidden sin in his life. Job wanted to die, and who could blame him? Yet Job would not take his own life. Though he expressed no hope in the future, he endured it all and would not sin against God.

Suicide is the final act of a lack of trust in God. It is utter selfishness in that it only wishes to be relieved of pain, yet leaving others in the pain of losing you. It is declaring that you do not believe God can or will change your condition. It is throwing away the blessing of life and the opportunity to serve God. It proclaims that you do not believe the promises of God.

Job knew he could not cross that line, even though he longed for death. If you have been in such desperation, or know someone that is right now, the story of Job can bring comfort. His end was greater and more blessed than he could ever have imagined during his suffering. We may not have such a glorious end, but if we are willing, like Job, we will learn the great lessons that suffering teaches. We will be drawn closer to the Lord and be enabled to encourage others in their suffering (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Remember: There are times when the promises of God seem out of reach. No matter how bad your circumstances, you can be sure that God’s promises will never fail. He cannot lie.

## 7/2 Job 21:7

*7 Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power?*

Job’s accusers kept insisting that he must have committed some horrible secret sin or all his calamities would not have happened. They believed those kinds of things only happen as God’s judgment on the wicked. It sounds good to those who are prosperous and at rest, but Job challenged the validity of that belief.

Certainly God is just. That is why it seems so reasonable to assume his accusers were right. Most people would tend to agree with them. There are times when God does afflict the sinner to get them to turn to Him, but Job is saying that is not always the case. He challenged them to ask the traveler and listen to the stories from their towns (Job 21:29-30). The wicked often flourish. In this life it can appear outwardly that the wicked are blessed beyond measure.

Job is honest in his observations. Prosperity or calamities often have nothing to do with one’s righteousness or sin. Consider Jesus’ crucifixion. It was as misunderstood in that day as Job’s calamity was. God is just, but not all justice is seen in this life. Job was struggling with understanding something that he had no way of discovering until the test was over and God revealed it. Sometimes we will never know, and yet, we must trust God to right all wrongs and repay in eternity. In the meantime, we put our hope in God and passionately pursue Him (Job 19:25-27).

Prayer: LORD, whatever You should allow in my life, grant me a steadfast spirit to endure in such a way as to glorify You. Bring me closer to You whether through prosperity or affliction.

## 7/3 Job 26:7, 10

*7 He stretches out the north over the void and hangs the earth on nothing.*

*10 He has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters at the boundary between light and darkness.*

Job is considered to be one of the oldest books in the Bible. In Job’s response to his friends, he speaks of the unsearchable majesty of God. Have you ever been trying to answer someone and in so doing you answer your own questions? It seems that Job is consoling himself regarding his lack of understanding of his misery and the injustice he sees in the world by looking at the mystery of God. There are so many wonders of nature that God has wrought, surely we cannot fathom what He is doing through our circumstances.

Millennia ago when Job wrote this, other cultures thought the earth was on Hercules’ back, or the backs of elephants, or on some unseen pillars. Not only did Job know the earth was suspended in space, but he also knew that our earth was round. The circle between light and darkness was never seen by man until a manned satellite went into space in 1960. Now, even remote corners of the earth have seen pictures from outer space and the beautiful semi-circle that moves across the ocean dividing the day from the night, just as Job described. To see the entire circle, one would have to see the entire globe at once. How could Job know this without a revelation from God?

What does this tell us about the Bible? Its words are trustworthy and true. If it declares science that won’t be known for millennia to come, its words regarding the heart of man and God are dependable as well.

Prayer: LORD, increase our heart’s desire for the wisdom and guidance of Your Word. Help us to treasure it more than gold and silver, or even as Job said, more than our portion of food (Job 23:12).

## 7/4 Job 41:11

*11 Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.*

When the Lord answered Job, He didn’t explain why Job had gone through all that he had endured. He simply asked Job to answer a few questions. Job wanted to ask God questions regarding his afflictions. In a sense, God answered the questions Job had been asking by asking questions of Job. Jesus would use the same teaching method. God asked questions about creation. The apostle Paul will pick up on this theme in his letter to the Romans. The invisible attributes of God are seen in the creation, including His eternal power and divine nature (Romans 1:20).

Our verse today was God’s reminder to Job that all he had was borrowed from God. God doesn’t need to justify giving or taking anything from anyone. All

belongs to Him, for He created it. It exists for His purposes. You can’t make God indebted to you by doing good deeds. Good works are expected of you. We are all indebted to God, but God is indebted to no one. The fact that He will repay us for our obedience is only due to His generosity.

When God did speak to Job, Job realized that he had nothing of value to say to God and that his complaints were not worth bringing up, for all that he ever had, including his body, belonged to God to do with as God pleased. The realization of this changes our perspective about everything. Paul reminds us of this in the New Testament by asking, “What do you have that you did not receive?”

(1Corinthians 4:7)

Consider: We never have a reason to complain to God, though He understands the pain in our hearts. We have innumerable reasons to praise Him!

## 7/5 Job 42:10

*10 And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.*

The LORD rebuked Job’s three friends, the ones Job called “miserable comforters.” They had been certain that Job had committed some secret sin for which God was punishing him. Instead of comforting Job, in their ignorance they judged Job guilty and deserving of what he endured. God judged Job’s friends as guilty. That reminds us of the saying of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, “For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged…” (Matthew 7:2). Sometimes we mean well but offer the wrong counsel.

The LORD told the three friends that they should offer a sacrifice for their sins and ask Job to pray for them. The tables were turned. They obeyed, and when poor sick Job prayed for them, God restored Job’s fortunes. In fact, he ended up with twice his former possessions. He even had seven sons and three daughters and lived to see his great-great-grandchildren.

As long as you have breath, never give up hope. Job became a priest to his friends and was surely a more humble and compassionate man. His fortunes being restored were a small thing compared to his newly deepened relationship with God. In the time of his testing, he sometimes dared to think of restoration (Job 14:14), but he wouldn’t have imagined how blessed he would actually become.

Consider: Have you prayed for friends who have misunderstood what you are going through? Just taking our eyes off our own troubles to pray for others is a blessing in itself!

## 7/6 Psalm 3:3

*3 But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.*

As we go through the Book of Psalms, I would encourage you to read the entire mentioned psalm. Most of them are quite short and can be read in a few minutes. Then read the devotional thought about the verse I comment on in that psalm.

David cried out to God when he found the number of his enemies was increasing. He heard that people were saying that God would not save him. Then he made this declaration. His shield was like none other. It was the LORD who protected him. The LORD was David’s glory. The LORD was the One that lifted his head when he was discouraged.

Once he remembered just who it was who was protecting him, he laid down and had a good night sleep. This psalm sounds like David’s solution to insomnia. He had trouble getting his mind to stop thinking about all the people who wanted to see him killed and replaying in his mind the things they said about him. Since the godly will be persecuted, this is something all God’s children need to learn. Don’t dwell on the opposition and their words. Dwell on the greatness of our God.

This was probably written when David fled from the uprising led by his son. At that point in his life he could look back on numerous incidences that proved God’s faithfulness to deliver him. He remembered the times that the LORD was his glory. When he had been discouraged in the past, it was the loving hand of the LORD that lifted his downcast head.

Now it is your turn. Are you dwelling on those that would discourage you and what they are saying? Turn your eyes to Jesus and remember what great things He has done in your past. Has He previously delivered you from a hopeless situation? Has He been your glory? Has He lifted your head when it hung in defeat? He’ll do it again!

Suggestion: Before you sleep tonight, focus on the great things God has done for you. Then sleep like a baby!

## 7/7 Psalm 5:3

*3 O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.*

Because you are reading this morning devotion, you have probably learned the blessing of the morning hours with the Lord. In the biography of all great men of God, you will find they spent their waking hours in the Word of God and prayer. They cry out to the Lord and watch for His response.

There is a reason that the Word comes first. It focuses our mind on the things of God. It speaks to us the will of God. You will find that it often addresses concerns on your heart and at times even answers your prayer before you pray. Any time is a good time for the Word and prayer, but beginning your day with these shows the priority of your life. It is preparation for all that the LORD will lead you through that day.

Perhaps the most difficult part for most is the watching. To be still before the LORD is a battle because we often assume that it is our action that accomplishes things, but in reality it is God-directed action that is fruitful. It is there in the stillness, waiting for the still, small voice, that you will find real intimacy with Him. After listening to His Word, hear how He would apply it. Allow His Spirit to correct and guide you. If there is one thing we need in our world today, it is to be still before the LORD and let Him speak to our hearts.

Consider: Will you commit to doing this as a lifelong habit? It begins the night before by getting to bed at an hour that will give you enough sleep to rise early.

## 7/8 Psalm 9:1

*1 I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.*

Everything we have is a gift from God. Everything! Even our afflictions serve to draw us to Him and to remember what is truly of value. If we can grasp this, then our lives will be filled with thanksgiving. We will give thanks to the LORD with our whole hearts, as well we should. Gratitude will permeate our attitudes and put a smile on our faces. It will overflow in generosity to others.

To not thank God for His abundant gifts is ingratitude. Israel exemplified this in the wilderness. That is why they were so often exhorted to recount what God had done for them. In the face of our trials and testing we forget all that we have been blessed with and the amazing intervention of God in our pasts.

Later in this psalm, David tells us to sing praises to the LORD. When we think of all His goodness to us, it should cause us to burst into songs of praise. In the same verse (Psalm 9:11), we are told to tell others what He has done. Share your testimony of God’s goodness and intervention in your life. That is one way to be a witness. It also keeps fresh in our mind the loving kindness of God to us. That helps us interpret our present struggles in a positive light, knowing God will use it for our good.

Consider: Take some time right now to recount the wonderful deeds of God in your life, and then give thanks with your whole heart.

## 7/9 Psalm 10:13

*13 Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, “You will not call to account”?*

This was written thousands of years ago, but you could hear it from some pulpits today. If Satan has an effective ploy, it is to get people to think that God is a god of love but not a god of judgment. There is no fear of God in the postmodern culture’s mindset. Those who have renounced God have convinced themselves that they can set their own rules. Right and wrong is what is convenient for their lusts at any given moment. “So if it was right for me, even if there is a God,” they say, “He can’t judge me for doing it.”

The fear of the Lord is to depart from evil. Without any fear of judgment, the wicked heart of man will slip further and further into depravity. Every sin and even the crimes of others will be justified in the eyes of the wicked. They will claim it is never anyone’s fault, but always the fault of some nebulous thing such as society or circumstance. Finally, like Adam in the Garden, they will point their finger at God. When their conscience convicts them or they are full of guilt, they will blame “those evil Bible thumpers” for pushing morality on them.

There is a God. He has given us His Word. He will call us all to give an account of the deeds done in our body. He will repay us all according to what we have done. The only way to escape His wrath upon evil is to accept the One that took the wrath you and I deserve in our place, Jesus. Out of that relationship will flow good deeds.

Consider: As the fear of God is abandoned, society will grow increasingly evil. You will see every excuse man can imagine to call evil good and to call good evil. Be a light in the darkness that testifies of the value of the fear of God.

## 7/10 Psalm 14:1

*1 The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.*

There are always plenty of fools. Some of them will say there is no God with their mouth, while others say it with their actions. Both say it in their hearts. They want to believe that lie so that they can live as they please. The corruption of their heart desires what is forbidden and destructive. Their actions are abominable and too diverse to list them all, though Paul makes a short list in Romans 1:21-32.

The psalmist is lamenting the fact that there is none that do good. Surely, all men are sinners, and none seek after God. But if we stop there, we would all be destined for hell. There would be no reason for hope in this life either. Thankfully, there is the grace of God that seeks us out and draws us to Himself. That is the only hope for man. It is restoring us from the captivity of sin to enjoy the fellowship that was lost in the Garden of Eden.

Once the Spirit of God enters our lives, good flows from Him through us. His goodness expects nothing in return and acts in unselfish love. This is the goodness David longed to see. He closes the psalm with a plea for salvation to come from Zion. In the Hebrew, which is the language David used, the word for salvation is “Yeshua.” That word is also a name. In the Old Testament it is Joshua, and in the New it is “Jesus.” O that Jesus would come from Zion and fill our hearts with His goodness. Then God’s people will rejoice and be glad. He has come!

Consider: Are you letting His goodness flow through you? Are you full of His joy?

## 7/11 Psalm 16:2

*2 I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.”*

The apostle James tells us that every good gift is from above (James 1:17). In the Hebrew language, David is saying the God of Israel, YHWH, is his master. Apart from YHWH there is no good to be found. Unless He is your master, you will never find anything good. That is the dilemma the world faces. Man wants to be his own master, but he also wants good. It is not possible.

The enemy of our soul will lie to us and tell us that something is good. We may experience a kind of temporal pleasure from it. But ultimately it is bad for us. Most of the temptations he offers cause us to be enslaved by them. We end up forsaking what could be good and indulging to the point of destruction. The forbidden excites but disappoints in the end.

On the other hand, the pleasures of God are eternal. The last verse of this psalm declares that at the right hand of the LORD are pleasures forever. That which is really good endures. True good is only found with the LORD as your Lord. He will never disappoint. He will never lie. He never gives us what is destructive to our soul. The choice is clear, temporal pleasures that chain us to evil, or Jesus as master of our lives with true good that gives pleasure forever.

Prayer: LORD, help me to discern the truth from a lie. Help me to see that Your rule over my life is true joy.

## 7/12 Psalm 16:10

*10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.*

David declared that his heart was glad and his whole being could rejoice and even rest securely because he knew God would not abandon his soul to the grave. The hope of heaven was just being revealed to God’s people. David may have been uncertain as to what would happen to him if he died. Since he was often in battle, that was a very real concern. Once he realized God would not abandon him after death, he could sleep soundly at night.

The end of our verse speaks of the “holy one.” Was David referring to himself or to the promised descendant who would reign forever, the Messiah (Mark 1:24)? Though the word for “holy one” in this verse can mean saint (Psalm 89:19), the apostles of the New Testament saw this as referring to Jesus. After all, David died and his body decayed, but Jesus rose from the dead without His body seeing corruption (Acts 13:35).

The fact that Jesus was raised does tell us He can raise our bodies as well. Our spirit goes to be with the LORD when our body dies, but the day will come when the resurrected Jesus will raise our bodies as well (1 Thessalonians 4:16). That should inspire in us the same gladness of heart, and our whole being to rejoice, and our body to rest securely. Our worst fear, death, has been conquered by Jesus. Sleep in peace. Walk through each day with joy.

Consider: The lack of fear that the believer possesses has been a great witness to the world that is so fearful of death.

## 7/13 Psalm 17:15

*15 As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.*

David had many close calls. This is another of his prayers to God for deliverance from a strong enemy. He asked God to keep him as the apple of his eye (Psalm 17:8). That is that little image of yourself that you see in another’s eye. He is asking for God to keep looking toward him as he looks toward God. He asks to be hidden under the shadow of God’s wing. That is the picture of a mother bird protecting her young.

He then gives an interesting description of his enemy. Their portion is in this life (Psalm 17:14). In other words, they live for today and forget that eternity awaits them. It seemed to David that God allowed them to be successful. They are satisfied with a multitude of children and pass their abundant wealth on to them.

Then, as is often the case with David’s songs, he ends with a declaration of praise. He reassures himself with what he knows is true in spite of appearances. David will behold the face of the LORD in righteousness. God will finish the work that He started in David. When he awakes from death, he will be satisfied with God’s likeness. John the Beloved wrote that when we see the LORD, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). The sin nature will be eliminated. Holiness will describe all that we do and say. In contrast with the wicked, that was David’s satisfaction. David lived for eternity.

Consider: Is the focus of your life this world or eternity?

## 7/14 Psalm 18:25-26

*25 With the merciful you show yourself merciful; with the blameless man you show yourself blameless; 26 with the purified you show yourself pure; and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous.*

We will reap what we sow. Our problem is that in our hearts we can’t find mercy or be blameless or pure. We need the One who is to remove our stubborn resistance to His goodness. Until He does, we are the crooked who find God to seem tortuous. That is because that is what it takes to get us to bow our knees. His resistance of our evil is due to His nature, but also to His desire to turn us from our wickedness.

Once we bow the knee and surrender to Him, suddenly we see how merciful He is. This explains why those who are not redeemed seem to be resisting God, even hating the thought of Him. They see Him continually resisting them. Until they bow the knee and receive His mercy, they will never comprehend it.

Surrendered to His lordship over our lives, we see Him as blameless and pure. Before, we accused God of all kinds of evil. Now we see that all He does is holy and just. Even when we can’t understand His hand, we can trust His heart. And because we begin to see the goodness of His nature as it applies to us, and we are expected to show that same nature toward others. We, too, are to resist evil and to be merciful, pure, and blameless. Jesus tells us to love one another as He has loved us (John 15:12). He tells to forgive one another if we desire to be forgiven

(Matthew 6:15).

Consider: If you find God to be tortuous, submit to Him and know His mercy. If you have done that but still find Him to be stern, ask yourself if you are representing His nature to others.

## 7/15 Psalm 22:27

*27 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.*

Psalm 22 tells of the details of the crucifixion of Jesus a thousand years before it came to pass. Like many of David’s psalms, it begins with a description of the trouble that he was enduring but ends in words of praise and trust. There is no doubt

that it is on the mind of Jesus at the horrible moment, for He quoted from it. When there was no voice of the Father to comfort Him, He had the eternal words of the Father in memory to recall. How we need to hide the Word in our hearts for our times of trouble!

The psalm ends with prophetic words. David proclaimed that the entire world will remember what the LORD did to rescue this One (Psalm 22:21, 24, 27). We do remember the resurrection of Jesus. We do stand in awe of what the LORD has done (verse 23). It has resulted in eternal life for all who believe (Psalm 22:26). It is the beginning of God establishing His reign in the hearts of men (Psalm 22:27).

When David said that future generations would be told about this, surely he knew this was much more than his current crisis. This was a prophetic word about those who would spread the gospel around the world (Psalm 22:30 - 31). All the earth would worship because of what would be told of the Lord Jesus. He faced death for us and conquered it! He paid our sin debt and rose in victory over the grave. The fact that you are reading this is part of the fulfillment of this prophecy. You are those from the ends of the earth that have remembered what Jesus did for you and have turned to Him and worshiped before Him.

Consider: How does it feel to read about yourself in Scripture?

## 7/16 Psalm 25:5

*5 Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.*

The secular world is teaching that there are multiple truths. What may be true for you may not be true for me. However, common sense teaches us there is truth or there is none. Truth by definition can’t be multiple things. Either this Scripture passage comes from the Bible, or it doesn’t. Either it is inspired by God or it isn’t. David was asking the LORD to lead him into God’s truth. That is the only real truth. What may seem true to man is often an illusion or just plain deception. What is the LORD’S truth? Our emotions can ride a roller coaster if we fix our thoughts on what appears to be true at the moment, but what is the LORD’S truth? We should long to be led in that truth, which is to be taught by God.

When we see God’s truth we learn the correct way of seeing things. It changes our attitude and our thinking. David needed this in many of his situations. And those in which he wasn’t led in the Lord’s truth resulted in compounded problems. The same will be true for every person.

God is our salvation from judgment, but also from wrong thinking and ignorance. That is why David was willing to wait on the Lord all day instead of running ahead with his own “good” thoughts. To be led into God’s truth and taught by Him will only result in ultimate blessing and fruitfulness.

Consider: Are you running ahead of God with your own “good” ideas, or are you waiting on the LORD to show you His truth?

## 7/17 Psalm 27:14

*14 Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!*

In this psalm, David extols all that God has meant to him, light, salvation, protection, vindication, help, and goodness. That gave him courage to believe that God would answer this prayer he was praying. If God had been all that to him in the past, and David could say that he was just as earnest in seeking God as he had ever been, then he knew God would be the same today.

When we find ourselves in what appears to be an impossible situation, when we can’t see any way out, we must remind ourselves of all that God has done in the past. Has He delivered you before? Has He been your light in darkness, the Savior of your soul, strength when you were weak, protected you from your enemies, helped you and been good to you? Well then, why not trust Him to be the same now? If you think your present situation is too tough for God, your idea of God is too small!

Now comes the hard part; wait for God. If you don’t know what to do or how He would have you proceed, then wait. Be strong. Let your heart take courage. Don’t fear. God is more than capable of delivering you. He is the same faithful God today as He was in the past. He never changes. Every time your mind tells you the situation is hopeless, look at all God has done in your past and in the Scriptures and take courage.

Consider: Waiting is difficult because our old nature is faithless and self-reliant. Waiting shows that we trust God to answer prayer. It shows our confidence in Him.

## 7/18 Psalm 32:9

*9 Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.*

This is another of David’s psalms of repentance. He is recalling the faithfulness of God to convict our hearts and then to forgive us when we confess our sins. Not only does God forgive, but He is the shelter we seek in times of trouble. He is our guide and instructor through life. He watches our every step as a father watches over the child He loves.

Because these characteristics are true of His nature, we should not be like a beast that refuses to come to his master unless he has some good thing in his hand that it desires. If you’ve ever gone to a corral to saddle up a horse, you know they don’t want to be near you. They know it means work and they’d just as soon wander around the coral and munch on oats.

David is telling us that we should not be like that dumb animal. We should desire God’s presence at all times, even if it means work, or conviction, or direction. We can do our own thing, but then we are pretty useless. The bit and bridle may be affliction to make us come to God when we refuse to heed His voice. He’d rather not have to use the bit, but if He has to do so for our good, He will. How much better to draw near out of reverence and love!

Consider: Do you have the understanding to draw near to God at all times?

## 7/19 Psalm 34:18-19

*18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. 19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.*

The way some present the gospel, you’d think Christians never have problems. Obviously our verses today tell us that just isn’t so. It may be a bed of roses, but roses have thorns. Every human life has struggles. If fame and wealth were the answer, we wouldn’t see so many famous people die from overdosing on drugs or suicide. No one is exempt from turmoil of the soul.

The great difference between the believer and others is that the LORD’s presence is there with us when we are brokenhearted or crushed in spirit. No one knows the pain you have experienced like the LORD does. They may have their own pain, but it is unique because each of us is unique. Certainly we can sympathize if we have endured a similar loss or struggle, but only the LORD really feels

your heart.

The Hebrew word for “save” means “to be open, wide, or free.” Our burdens can seem to close us in and take us captive. God promises He will set us free. Life will open up and all its wonderful possibilities will be there again. Though our afflictions are many, He promises to deliver us (snatch away or pluck out) from them all. Even death will not defeat us. Our Deliverer is our rescuer from all that we face in this fallen world. He does not keep us from the afflictions, for they are instruments to grow and strengthen us. God will deliver us from them all.

Reminder: I’d encourage you to note this verse in the front of your Bible or of this book. When the next trial comes, it will be there for you to cling to.

## 7/20 Psalm 37:8

*8 Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.*

It is impossible not to become angry at times. It is a natural emotion. But those who have the power of the Spirit can keep it in check. We should consider what has caused that emotion to surface and then refrain from continuing in it. Anger that is nourished only turns to rage. Rage is dangerous to ourselves and to others, and the apostle Paul tells us “to put it away from you” (Ephesians 4:31).

Wrath is doing something with the anger. It’s payback. When we feel we have been treated unjustly, we want to get even. That often means lowering our self to the level of the one that made us angry. God promises that He will repay. He tells us vengeance belongs to Him (Romans 12:19). Our wrath does not take all things into account like God’s wrath does. Leaving vengeance to God shows that you trust Him.

Perhaps the most difficult portion of our verse today is the command not to fret. We can discipline ourselves to refrain from anger and forsake wrath, but to not fret takes real spiritual maturity. This is ultimately the fruit of trusting God in all things. Fretting, or being anxious about situations, only causes us to dwell on the problem. Instead of waiting for God’s solution, we come up with our plans that often compound the problems. Besides that, you may end up with ulcers! There is a wonderful sense of peace that surrounds the believer who has learned to leave everything in the hands of God. It doesn’t mean that they are inactive, but rather that they wait for God to act and then join Him. Then, instead of tending toward evil, they find that leaving things to God tends to righteousness and peace.

Consider: Do you have this kind of faith in God? Do you fret? What steps of spiritual growth do you need to obey this verse?

## 7/21 Psalm 49:15

*15 But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. Selah*

The psalmist declares that the ransom for a person’s soul is precious, and no man has the wealth to pay such a price (Psalm 49:7-9). He realized that financial wealth does a person no eternal good. He also saw that no human has the assets to appease God for their sin. No one has enough good deeds. We don’t have anything that God would accept as a payment for his or her sins.

The reality of heaven was not a clear concept in the days of the early kings of Israel. At that time many believed we simply died and would cease to exist or that we would be in some shadowy land of the dead. But in our verse today the psalmist says that is not true. He knew that somehow God would ransom his soul from the power of the grave. Man could not do it, but God could. And God did! It was the God-man Christ Jesus who gave the ransom of a perfect life and his blood shed for us that ransoms all who will come to Him by faith. What a precious ransom!

The psalmist declared that God would receive him. God cannot receive into His presence anything that is sinful. That means the work of sanctifying us for all eternity will be completed. The ransom was paid by our Savior, but that began the work of transformation which will be completed when we see Him face to face (1 John 3:2). It is at work even now, challenging us to change the way we think, speak, and act.

Consider: How succinctly this verse sums up what God is doing in and for us!

## 7/22 Psalm 50:23

*23 The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!”*

Do we have anything other than what God has given us? If God has given us everything, life, breath, senses, the earth and its fullness, and much more, then how grateful we should be each and every day. If you are reading this, then He has also given you His word and a hunger for it. But greatest of all, if you are saved, then you know He has given you His only Son. We are so blessed that we behave like spoiled children that expect abundant goodness at all times. If we must endure a little hardship to build our character, we whine and complain. We should be speaking nothing but praise and thanksgiving every waking hour.

Under the old covenant, Israel would offer sacrifices of animals and cakes as an offering of thankfulness. The psalmist is saying that thanksgiving from our heart glorifies God. To acknowledge God’s goodness in our life brings Him glory that is rightly due Him. We are not giving Him what should be His when we don’t express our gratitude.

If we want to be victorious in life and have God intervene on our behalf, we should live in a way that is pleasing to Him. Most people expect God to answer their prayers and rescue them from situations, but God expects them to correct their ways so He can intervene. God may be keeping the pressure on so that we acknowledge our sin and change our ways. One sin we so often overlook is this sin of ingratitude.

Consider: Make genuine praise and thanksgiving a part of your daily sacrifice (Hebrews 13:15). If you are in a time of testing, praise God for His goodness and see how it helps your attitude. It may very well usher in the salvation of God.

## 7/23 Psalm 55:22

*22 Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.*

The burdens of life can be like lugging around a couple of fifty-pound suitcases. You might be able to do it for a while on your own, until you hit a flight of stairs, and eventually there are always stairs to climb. Those who have a relationship with the LORD have a solution to life’s hardships. Cast that burden on the LORD. Give Him all the anxiety, the frustration, the weight of whatever it is you’ve been trying to lug around on your own.

When you know that the LORD has called you into His service, you can know that whatever hinders you from that service is something He will gladly carry for you. He knows how small your shoulders are. Do you know how big His are? He can easily carry what seems impossible to you and me.

“Cast” is a term we use when we fish with a line. You heave the pole and let the line fly as far out as it will go. That is how we must deal with our burdens. Don’t halfheartedly hand them to the LORD. Cast them upon Him. Every time you find you have reeled them back in, just cast them again. Know that He is willing and much more capable than you to take care of them. Now you are free to go about serving Him unhindered by those burdens.

If He is your righteousness and you are walking with Him, He will not allow the circumstances of life to remove you from His service. He will help you to stay on track.

Remember: Keep casting. He will gladly carry those burdens so that you can be about your Father’s business.

## 7/24 Psalm 57:10-11

*10 For your steadfast love is great to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. 11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!*

The two most repeated attributes of God in the Old Testament are His steadfast love and His faithfulness. There is an impression given by many that the Old Testament God is a wrathful God of vengeance. That is a part of His character. He won’t stand for evil and injustice. But steadfast love and faithfulness are mentioned with much greater frequency.

The psalmist was asking God for mercy because of the attacks of people who were acting like lions and snakes. He asked to take refuge under the shadow of the LORD’s wing. He knew that God would cause his enemies’ plots against him to be the very thing that defeated them, so he decided to write this song of praise to God.

The reason he knew it would all work out was these precious attributes of our God. He declared that the God’s steadfast love is great to the heavens. We are swimming in it as we go through each day. It surrounds us even on the highest mountain peak. God’s faithfulness is just as all encompassing. Therefore God should be exalted above the heavens. His glory is over the whole earth for those with eyes to see. The seraphim see it. The cry continually, “the whole earth is full of your glory” (Isaiah 6:3)! These wonderful attributes of God cover the whole earth. You can never get away from His steadfast love and faithfulness. Count on these attributes of God, for they will never fail.

Remember: Wherever you are, you are surrounded by the steadfast love and faithfulness of God. You are safe if you take refuge under these wings.

## 7/25 Psalm 62:1

*1 For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.*

David was faced with people who kept attacking him over and over. Some would speak kindly to him and then lie about him behind his back. Their goal was to bring him down from the calling God had placed on his life. David reminded himself that the only way to deal with these people was to look to God.

The soul is the mind, will, and emotions of a person. David’s mind could have devised a way to get even. His will could have led him to attack them like they were attacking him. His emotions could have led him to slaughter them. But David knew that was not the best way to deal with them. The best way was to have his whole inner being to wait in silence on God alone.

Waiting in silence is a discipline. We are so prone to taking matters into our own hands and making things worse than they already are. Our mind will naturally go over and over the treachery we have seen. To still our thoughts and emotions and silently wait for God can only be done by those who have disciplined their inner life. Some would say that is impossible. David tells it is possible.

True salvation from a situation only comes from God. He is the only one who can put an end to any kind of troubles we face. When we devise our own plans, we often compound the problem or create a new problem. God knows every detail and every consequence. It only makes sense to wait in silence for His salvation from whatever you are facing today. He will act or will show you how to act. Still your soul and wait silently for Him alone.

Consider: Have you learned to discipline your soul?

## 7/26 Psalm 65:4

*4 Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!*

If you are in Christ, then this verse is speaking to you. You are the blessed one God has chosen to bring near to Himself. If you pray without ceasing, then you continually dwell in His courts. That means the courts of God’s temple in the heavenly realm. You have the privilege that only the High Priest had under the old covenant. You can go right into the Most Holy place and speak with God Almighty.

When you enter into times of prayer, it may help to see this in your mind. Around the mercy seat of God, which is His throne, are the four seraphim flying about singing God’s praise (Isaiah 6:2-3). Then there are the 24 elders surrounding the throne (Revelation 5:8). Beyond that are countless angels and saints that have gone before us (Revelation 5:11-13) who are all worshiping the holiness of God. You are there among them to bring your requests to God and to hear what He would say to you, a blessed one chosen to draw near. In spite of this great throng, the manifest presence of God over the throne is able to hear you individually and to address you alone.

Everything of earth brings such a limited satisfaction, but here there is satisfaction that fills the heart to overflowing. Here before the throne the deepest longings are met completely. The goodness of God is beyond our ability to fully comprehend. The holiness of God is more beautiful than anything in all His creation. It captivates and enthralls our soul. And as we behold Him, we are being changed from one degree of glory to another by the Spirit of the One we adore (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Consider: Do you realize the blessedness of prayer?

## 7/27 Psalm 69:9

*9 For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.*

When Jesus began His ministry, one of the first things He did was to make a whip and chase all the money changers and merchants from the Court of the Gentiles. That was the place the nations of the world were to come and pray to the God of Israel. Instead of being a quiet, meditative place, it was full of men competing for business. Jesus actions were quite audacious! He took charge over

what the priests had permitted. To challenge a source of their income was putting His life at risk. The disciples, seeing Jesus’ fury, recalled our verse for today (John 2:17).

Jesus was certainly concerned that the nations be drawn to the one true God, but He also knew this Temple would be torn down (Matthew 24:2). He knew the temple of God would consist of living stones, His followers. His demonstration showed us how zealous He is that our hearts not be distracted by a worship of wealth. Instead He would have us be focused on communion with Him in prayer. Then the world will be drawn to Him by our life.

The psalmist took very personally the reproaches people spoke toward the Temple. Jesus did as well. Every true believer will be filled with a consuming zeal to see that the testimony of God’s house, the body of believers, attracts the world to the Son of God and all His goodness. The bad testimonies of those who claim to be Christians break our hearts because they misrepresent Him. Those who would divide church families grieve us because of the message it sends to the world.

Consider: Is the zeal for God’s house consuming you? Do you personally feel the reproaches?

## 7/28 Psalm 78:4, 8

*4 We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.*

*8 and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.*

The psalm is recounting of the faithlessness of the people of Israel and the faithfulness of God. The psalmist tells the readers not to hide the ungodly deeds of their ancestors, and to remind them of the glorious deeds of God. The contrast makes the ways of the forefathers to appear as stubborn as they truly were. At the same time, that contrast shows God to be merciful and yet righteous.

At times God was patient and gracious. At other times He poured out his wrath on them to turn them from the ungrateful ways. It is important to tell our children the true spiritual history as well, so that they will not repeat the sins of their ancestors. Even the history of your nation will surely tell the same story, for it is the story of mankind (Recommended: The Light and the Glory by Peter Marshall).

If we look at the history of the church we see the same thing. At times the leaders turn the people away from God by hiding the truth. At other times they are openly rebellious against God, as they seek power and worldly exaltation. God has been faithful to discipline the church like He disciplined Israel.

Your own particular church has its own history. If we only tell the flowery parts, what will our children learn? We have to share the whole story so that they will not follow the path of the stubborn and rebellious. We have to speak of God’s disciplining hand and not make light of it or they will not fear the Lord.

Consider: If we do not record the events of God’s discipline and blessing in our lives and that of our churches, the lessons will be forgotten and have to be repeated by future generations.

## 7/29 Psalm 81:8

*8 Hear, O my people, while I admonish you! O Israel, if you would but listen to me!*

In this psalm, God is speaking to the remnant of Israel. He reminds the people of how He delivered them from Egypt. He longed to bless them with abundance. The problem was that they held on to their foreign gods. He continued to show them signs and wonders and provide for them, but they would not listen and act on what they heard.

Nothing has changed! The church today would like to think it is not like Israel. When we read of the continual rebellious acts of Israel in the wilderness, we often marvel at how people could be so stubborn. Yet today, we have the account of what God did throughout history, the Word of God, and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, yet we still will not listen and change.

The Word of God is so clear on so many issues: divorce, sex outside of marriage, abortion, division, the role of elders, and many other things. But in our arrogance we declare that those things were for another culture or just don’t apply to us. We assume we can refuse to hear the voice of the Lord from His inspired Word and not suffer the same consequences as Israel. God longs to bless us. We see that blessing in past times of obedience, but even as His hand of blessing lifts from us, as suffering and loss disciplines our lives, we, too, refuse to listen.

Consider: Do I need to repent and change my attitude toward the Word of God?

## 7/30 Psalm 86:11

*11 Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.*

In contrast to yesterday’s devotion, this is a cry to hear what the Word of God teaches in all its fullness that the psalmist might order his life according to that truth. This hungry heart is a gift from God. Jesus said the one that is hungry and thirsty for righteousness will be filled (Matthew 5:6).

When we begin our walk in the Spirit, our heart is often divided because of our previous idols. These were things that we sought after to find fulfillment or satisfaction. When we find that Christ is the sum of everything that is truly good, we are still often tempted to look back on the old pleasures. They will compete for first place in our hearts. This is why the psalmist asked that God would unite his heart to fear God’s name.

God’s name is the sum of His attributes. To fear who He is as a righteous God who loves us and who will discipline us deters us from going back to the old pleasures that destroy us. It is to accept the fact that He is our Creator who has shown us love to the greatest possible extent and provided justification that we could never earn. The only right response is a heart that is wholly devoted to Him!

Prayer: Unite my heart to fear Your name!

## 7/31 Psalm 88:18

*18 You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness.*

In Jerusalem, below the house of Caiaphas, archeologists have discovered a cistern (a hole carved deep into limestone for storing water). When the crusaders found it, they etched and painted crosses in it. It is now believed that Jesus was held in this dry cistern. He would have been lowered in by rope and left alone in the darkness to await His fate.

His disciples had all deserted Him. Peter had denied he knew Him. The voice of the Father was silent. Jesus knew the horror that lay ahead. Alone, He would have found solace in this psalm, knowing that a thousand years earlier, someone had gone through an experience that caused him to put these words to writing and that the Father had them recorded for the Son. It was all in the Father’s hands, no matter how hopeless the situation seemed.

There are psalms for us too. They speak of the pain of the heart and encourage us to trust God. If God saw the psalmists through to victory, and if they could voice trust in God in the midst of their trials, then He can speak to us through them in a similar manner. If Jesus used them for comfort in His darkest hour, then we should do the same.

Remember: In your times of trial, you will find the Psalms to be the voice of the LORD to your soul.

August

## 8/1 Psalm 90:12

*12 So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.*

This psalm is attributed to Moses. It laments of the brevity and trouble of the life of man. While a thousand years are as a day to God, the life of man is like a few hours in the night to God. Our sins are always before Him, and at His word our lives are over.

Moses attributes much of man’s trouble to a lack of the fear of God. The solution to our lack of the fear of God is to learn how quickly man’s life passes. If we knew how few days we have before we stand before our Creator to give an account of our lives, we would be in earnest to know how to wisely spend them. We would see which choices would be a waste of time and which ones would prepare us for eternity. Moses goes on to ask for God to establish the work of our hands. In other words, guide us to do things that are lasting. The things that are passing are not worth the few and precious days we have here.

Ask elderly people how quickly life passes and they will tell you that the days seem to speed up as we age. Ask them what they regret not having done and it is almost always something to do with eternal things. Only God can give us a heart of wisdom to spend our days as He has planned uniquely for each of us (Ephesians 2:10). We must seek His heart to have a heart of wisdom.

Prayer: Let the verse for today be the cry of your heart to God this morning.

## 8/2 Psalm 94:19

*19 When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.*

Life is filled with many cares. The man or woman with few cares is likely someone that is not engaged in his or her home, church, or community. The more engaged you are, the more you must deal with people. The more you deal with people, the more conflict and cares fall on your shoulders. Of course we are to cast them on the Lord (1 Peter 5:7). We are told not to be anxious (Philippians 4:6), nevertheless, we must face the situations and see that our duties are fulfilled.

The psalmist wrote that in those times when the cares of his heart are many, he had found an avenue to cheer his soul. It was the consolations that come from the LORD. One of those consolations is to put our cares into His hands and trust Him to see us through. Another is to know His love for us and His power to affect our situations. Another is the promises found in His Word and the record of His help to His people.

When our mind is fixed on the cares, going over and over them rarely helps us. It is when we turn our minds to the Lord and the consolation He offers that our hearts are cheered. To focus on Him and His greatness, His wonders, and His goodness is what will carry us through the trials with confidence and trust. The cares are so much lighter when we know He is carrying us.

Consider: If the Lord is carrying you, aren’t your cares really carried by Him? Allow that truth to cheer your heart right now.

## 8/3 Psalm 103:2

*2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,*

David begins this psalm on a personal note. He commands his soul and all that is within him to bless the Lord. The word that is translated “bless” also means “to adore, to give thanks, or to praise.” He repeats the order in the next verse, our verse for today. Sometimes our spirit must order our soul (mind, will, and emotions) to do what is right. We don’t always feel like doing what we should do.

The reason for this command begins with another order: “forget not all his benefits . . .” Don’t dwell on what is not to your liking, but dwell on all that God has blessed you with. Don’t be like Eve in the Garden lusting after the one forbidden thing when there is a world of blessing all around you.

The first on David’s list of benefits should be the first on our lists too, the forgiveness of sins. Next he writes of the healing of our bodies. We just take it for granted that our wounds and sicknesses heal. In the rare case that we don’t heal naturally within a week, we run to God and ask why. The natural healing of our bodies is an amazing gift from God. Next is saving us from an early death. That is followed by the gift of a crown of steadfast love and mercy. God is so loving and merciful that we often take it for granted. David follows that with the satisfying good things of life that renew our strength. That must mean food and sleep which are pleasurable experiences. Imagine if these were not pleasant things to do! We need to do as David did and order our soul to stop and adore and praise God for His abundant goodness towards us.

Consider: The psalm closes with a command for all angels and all people to bless the Lord! Take some time right now to remember His many benefits toward you and praise Him for His goodness and steadfast love.

## 8/4 Psalm 107:24

*24 they saw the deeds of the LORD, his wondrous works in the deep.*

This verse refers to the miracles of salvation that God worked for those in ships tossed by storms. Tomorrow’s devotion is also on that topic. In this one devotional I will take the verse out of its context, though there are others that speak directly of the sea creatures (Psalm 146:6; 148:7). The very day I came to this psalm I happened to be diving in the ocean off the Hawaiian Islands. We came upon an octopus. Holding it in our hands, it squirted its ink cloud to try to escape. It immediately turned the color of skin to camouflage itself in our hands. A moment before it looked just like the texture and color of the coral it was resting on.

These amazing creatures have a circulatory system much different from ours. Instead of using iron to bond to oxygen molecules, their system uses copper. The spent blood is stored in a sack to be used as ink to help cover an escape. The creature’s muscles are on the outside of their bodies which enables them to take the shape and texture of their surroundings. The dive master said that either God designed this creature uniquely or it came from another planet. We know which.

That evening we snorkeled on the surface of the water at night with bright lights that drew plankton. Giant manta rays, whose wing spans can reach 16 feet, would gracefully fly in circles under us with their bellies toward ours as they scooped up the plankton just inches under us. They sense where we are by the electromagnetic energy in our bodies. We saw God’s wondrous works in the deep. It is one of my favorite things to do as we marvel at the creativity and diversity of God’s designs. Nature is God’s second Bible. It declares the greatness of God.

Consider: We often say, “Take time to smell the roses.” Have you taken time to look at nature’s glorious design and marveled at God’s creativity? It is one of the many ways that we can worship Him.

## 8/5 Psalm 107:29-30

*29 He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. 30 Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven.*

The psalmist is recounting the glorious deeds of God and attributing them to His steadfast love for us. He asks us to remember all the wonderful things that God has done for mankind. In the middle of the list of wonders is this passage about rescuing those tossed by a stormy sea. It could be about Noah’s ark, but this is recounted in the midst of things done for the nation of Israel. It could be about Jonah, but it speaks of more than one person. Apparently we do not have a record of the account of which the writer speaks.

In the Gospels, we do have the account of Jesus with His disciples crossing the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35-41). Jesus was asleep while the disciples were fearful of drowning. When they woke Him, He rebuked the wind and the waves and there was a great calm. In another incident, the wind was against them and the disciples saw Jesus walking toward them on the water. When He got in the boat, the winds ceased and they were immediately at their destination (John 6:21; Matthew 14:32). These accounts sound exactly like our verse today though they were written centuries before they came to pass.

There are storms of trying times in all of our lives. It is the LORD alone that can still them and bring us to the destinations He has put in our hearts. We need to invite Him to be on board the ship of our lives, fix our eyes on Him, and trust Him to see us through. One word from Him and the waves will be calmed. His very presence causes the winds to cease.

Encouragement: Invite the LORD to be with you in the midst of your trial and you will see the wind cease. The desired haven is His presence.

## 8/6 Psalm 112:7

*7 He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD.*

The people who fear the LORD and delight in His word are promised good things in this psalm. They are generous, merciful, gracious and just in their dealings with others. They and their children are blessed. But the one verse to consider today also shows us their attitude toward bad news.

Because they fear the LORD, they conduct their lives in a way that is guilt free. When they hear something discouraging, there is no need to search their hearts to see if it is the discipline of God. They search their hearts continually and order their lives in accord with God’s Word. That is why their hearts are firm when they hear bad news. They know situations come and go. What seems catastrophic today can turn out to be a blessing tomorrow. If they are right with God, there is no need to fear. God will see them through whatever comes. They have kept the main thing as the main thing.

This peace of mind during times of testing is also the result of trusting the LORD. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and present in your situation. He cares for you. Nothing gets by Him or surprises Him. In the end you will prevail over whatever has come. Those who delighted in your temporary trouble will be upset as you rise above it all. You will be victorious while the wicked melt away. Your desire in the LORD will be satisfied, while their desire in the world will leave them empty.

Remember: When you are tempted to fear, and when your heart is tempted to be shaken, trust the LORD. Take great delight in His Word.

## 8/7 Psalm 118:20-21

*20 This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. 21 I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.*

Our verse for today comes from a psalm in which the psalmist praised God for saving him from death. It is followed by the verse that Jesus applied to Himself. He is the cornerstone that the builders rejected. The rulers of Israel did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. But when Jesus applied that verse to Himself, those who knew this popular psalm would have thought of the earlier verses and seen more fully what He was implying.

The psalmist calls the gate “righteousness” He also calls it “the gate of the LORD” and says, “the righteous shall enter through it,” but he doesn’t say how to enter it. For us on this side of the cross, the next verse seems so clear. The LORD became our salvation from the second death. He is the only one that could provide salvation by becoming our salvation in giving His life for us.

If you think that may be stretching the meaning of the text, consider that the word “salvation” in the Hebrew language is “Yeshua.” That was Jesus’ name. The very next verse is the capstone verse. Yeshua, the stone the builders have rejected, has become the cornerstone! He is our salvation. It is all based on Him, even though the rulers of His day had Him put to death.

Consider: How amazing is the Word of God! While the psalmist meant one thing, the Spirit directed Him to write in such a way that the words would specifically point to the Messiah, who called Himself “the gate” and promised those who enter in by Him will be saved (John 10:9). He referred to Himself as the Cornerstone (Luke 20:17). Clearly Jesus saw this passage as pointing specifically to Him.

## 8/8 Psalm 119:18

*18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*

This is my prayer each time I open the Word of God to read. Before I write each devotional, I have asked the LORD to open my eyes to the riches in His Word. In this same psalm, the author says the Word of God is more valuable to him than thousands of pieces of gold and silver. The more you see in it, the more valuable it becomes to you. These devotional thoughts are meant to stimulate your appreciation for the Word and see some of its riches so that you will hunger to spend more time in the Bible searching out its treasures.

When you come to the Word with expectation and pray for God to open your eyes to the wondrous things within it, you will experience God speaking to you through it. Perhaps you have noticed that to some extent in the verses of this devotional. Because God is all-knowing and cares about you, you can expect to hear His voice in His Word.

Study is not a haphazard thing. I would suggest you take one book of the Bible at a time. Go though it with some study helps such as a Bible handbook or a good commentary. Beware of commentaries that question the validity of the Bible. Don’t be as concerned regarding how much you read as you are with understanding what you have read. Ask yourself what is being said and why. How does it apply to you today? Be consistent. Attend a Bible-study group and a church that preaches through one book of the Bible at a time, explaining the passage and applying it to your lives. Soon you will find the words of the Bible to be as valuable to you as they were to the psalmist.

Prayer: LORD, open our eyes to behold wondrous things out of Your Word.

## 8/9 Psalm 119:97

*97 Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.*

As you begin to increasingly value the Word of God, your love for it will grow. At first, time in the Word is a discipline. You force yourself to do what you know is good for your spirit. In time, you develop such a love for it that you don’t want to go a day without it. The encouragement, comfort and guidance it brings become a daily necessity.

The verses that speak to your heart will remain with you throughout the day. You will talk about them with those you confide in, because you will want to share the Bible’s richness. God’s words instruct you in having the right attitude about the situations you are facing. They speak to your heart about the steps you should take. They keep you from tripping up in the places you are prone to stumble. That is why you go over them throughout the day.

A few verse later in this psalm (119:105), we are told that the Word is a lamp for our feet. The oil lamps at that time were the equivalent of a candle. You could not see far in front of you, but they did give enough light to keep you from stumbling over something in your path. As we meditate on the Word during our walk through the day, we will see stones in our path that we used to trip over: offenses, temptations, and worthless activities. But if we hurry through our time in the Word and don’t take it with us, meditating on what it spoke to our heart, those things will still trip us up because we will not have the light of the Word to expose them.

Consider: Have you grown to love God’s Word? Are you taking it with you throughout your day? Increasing love for the Word will result in increased meditation of it during your day.

## 8/10 Psalm 119:165

*165 Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.*

The world can’t provide real peace. There can be absence of war, but just the continual threat of it removes the peace of the heart. We can settle differences with neighbors, but before long another issue comes up. I’ve seen people move to another town because of conflict with their neighbors. Shortly after they moved, the neighbors moved too. Even isolation can’t provide peace of the heart, for we were designed to live in community.

Great peace is only found by those who love the Word of God. It is there that our questions of life and purpose are answered. It is in God’s Word that we have the promises that comfort our hearts when the world is in turmoil around us. Only in the Bible do we find the assurance of who God is and His intentions for our lives and for eternity.

Those with that great peace are not easily moved to an agitated state. Their countenance gleams with that peace even when circumstances aren’t favorable. At times, they may fix their eyes on the trouble and be moved from that place of great peace, but they quickly recognize their departure and return to the Word of God and the peace it brings. Their peaceful state is a witness to others that are searching for answers.

Consider: Is your life a witness of the great peace of those who love God’s Word? If not, pray and ask the LORD to give you a greater love for His Word. That is a prayer He will delight to answer.

## 8/11 Psalm 123:2

*2 Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he has mercy upon us.*

Servants of ancient times would wait quietly watching the hand of their master for instruction. A slight signal of His hand was all that was needed to send them scurrying into action. There were different signals for different duties. Woe to the servant who missed the signal. And so, the eyes of the servants were fixed upon their master’s hand.

The psalmist tells us that in the same way, his eyes are fixed upon the One enthroned in the heavens, the ultimate Master of all things. The nation of Israel had suffered the contempt of other nations and the scorn of the prideful, but they were determined not to act without the Master’s instruction. To run off on their own and do what they thought best would only make matters worse. They needed God’s merciful direction.

That was a lesson they had learned from mistakes of the past and the resultant captivity of the nation. In the same way, we come to a place in our spiritual walk when we learn that acting without God’s instruction is a waste of effort at best, and more than likely compounds our problems. We need the merciful direction of the Holy Spirit. We need to see God’s invitation to join Him in what He is doing and not play god on our own. We need to fix our eyes on the hand of the LORD and jump into action when we have His direction.

Prayer: LORD, teach us to wait for Your instruction. Help us to remember that without You, we can do nothing of lasting value.

## 8/12 Psalm 135:3

*3 Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing to his name, for it is pleasant!*

Judaism was the one faith that emphasized music as a part of worship. Christianity (fulfilled Judaism) took it to an even higher emphasis. Music is an amazing gift from God. It is mathematical, but it is also emotional. It reaches down into our inner being. I have sung hymns with Alzheimer patients. They may hold the hymnal upside down and not remember their own children’s name but they remember every word of a hymn they grew up singing.

We emphasize music because it is one form of praise. We praise the LORD because He is good. His character is the very standard of what goodness is. He is merciful and yet just. He is loving while remaining holy. He is caring but also disciplines. His name represents all these wonderful attributes and so we sing praise to His name.

The verse ends by telling us another reason we sing. We sing because it is pleasant. We derive pleasure from singing God’s praise. It is one way to express our heart in unity with others who feel the same. That expression could also be translated, “for He is beautiful.” I find that when a phrase can be translated two ways, both are applicable. God the Father is beautiful in loving us to such a degree that He would give His beloved Son as a sacrifice that we might be sanctified and live eternally in His presence. God the Son is beautiful in His willingness to take our punishment in our place and call us brothers (Romans 8:29). Doesn’t that make your heart want to sing? Enjoy the gift of music as you wholeheartedly sing

His praise.

Consider: If you have not experienced the joy of singing, it may be because of embarrassment. Find a secluded place and sing with your whole heart. Do it again and again. You will soon want to sing with the family of God as they lift up a song of praise. If you are tone deaf, consider the fact that God hears your heart in perfect pitch.

## 8/13 Psalm 136:1

*1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.*

Ancient Israel frequently mentioned the steadfast love of the LORD. It is the most common characteristic of God described in the Old Testament. That is quite different from how many think of the Old Testament God. In this psalm, every one of the 26 verses ends with the phrase, “for his steadfast love endures forever”.

Some of the reasons the psalmist lists are acts of creation, deliverance from bondage in Egypt, victory over their enemies, the gift of the Promised Land, remembering them when they weren’t doing well, rescue from their enemies, and the provision of food for all people. It is a psalm that counts their blessings but also relates each blessing to the steadfast love of God.

What signs do you have of the steadfast love of the LORD? The psalmist went all the way back and thanked God for the dry land, the sun, and the moon and stars. Earth and our solar system are fine-tuned for the benefit of mankind. The people didn’t understand all the science behind it when the psalm was written, but now we can see every detail was designed and adjusted by God.

What has God delivered you from? If you know Him as your Savior, you can thank Him for deliverance from slavery to self, from certain judgment, from a meaningless existence. We can thank Him for a relationship with Him through the good times and bad. All of these blessings and so many more are because “he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever”.

Consider: I have encouraged you to list your blessings before, but this time as you list each one, consider how it demonstrates God’s unfailing love toward you. Doing so regularly will not only help your attitude, but it will deepen your appreciation of God.

## 8/14 Psalm 143:10

*10 Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!*

When David’s soul was overwhelmed by constant attacks from his enemies, he always pled his case to the Lord. He did not expect God to answer because he was righteous (Psalm 143:2). He asked for God’s intervention because he was God’s servant (Psalm 143:12) who had placed his trust in God (Psalm 143:8). David asked for a quick answer, to hear some good news in the morning that would be an expression of the steadfast love of God toward him.

There are times in life when we enter into this seemingly hopeless situation like that David experienced. The enemy seems to get the upper hand time and time again. Everything seems to be unfair. Like David, our spirit begins to fail. All we can see is discouragement. Those are the times when we cry out to God for a fresh expression of His love toward us. We plead for Him to teach us the next step to take. If He is our God, then we should be doing His will. If we are obeying what He teaches us, then whatever comes, we know we are in His hands.

David asks the same thing again in different words. This is a common literary tool in Hebrew called “parallelism.” To be taught by God to do His will is the same as being led by His good Spirit. His will is to be led by His Spirit. We have our own “good” ideas, but the only truly good direction is that of the Spirit. David was worn down by his enemies. He needed to be led on level ground for a time so that his spirit could be refreshed. We will find there are times when we need to ask for the same period of refreshing while we continue to walk in obedience.

Consider: The best preparation for future trials is to be taught to do God’s will and be led by His Spirit today. What steps will you take to let Him teach and lead you today?

## 8/15 Psalm 147:11

*11 but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.*

Children of God at times wonder if God is pleased with them. We see those who are so effective in service to God and wish we were like them. Does God love us just as much as He loves these ministers of God? Our verse today answers that question. The LORD takes pleasure in those of fear Him and hope in His steadfast love. The very fact that you are concerned about whether or not you are pleasing to God, which is a sign that you fear Him, is something He takes pleasure in. It shows you respect and honor Him and want to please Him. You recognize that He is a just God and will not stand for evil.

At the same time, you hope in His steadfast love. You can see He is just and you fear that justice while also seeing that He is love. You place your hope in that steadfast love. We really have no other hope than this wonderful nature of God. Recognition of these qualities gives the LORD pleasure.

It is these two attributes of God that man needs to understand if we are to be pleasing to Him. It isn’t our actions, though recognition of these attributes will change our actions. If God was not just, what kind of a God would He be? If He did not exhibit steadfast love, what kind of a God would He be? He is pleased with you when you recognize these two essential qualities of His nature. He knows your heart.

Consider: As these are essential qualities of our good God, should they not also be essential qualities we learn to express by the help of God’s Spirit?

## 8/16 Proverbs 1:23

*23 If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you.*

The proverb is pleading with all who will hear to shun evil ways and to listen to wisdom. Rabbinical commentaries equate wisdom to the Messiah, who we know as Christ Jesus. John the Beloved tells us that He was in the beginning (John 1:1-2). Proverbs tell us wisdom was before the creation of the earth (Proverbs 8:23). We can read this as if it was Jesus speaking to us.

To turn at the reproof of the LORD is to receive conviction and repent. To repent means to completely change direction. Hearing the LORD and receiving His word and acting on it is the way of salvation, for Jesus is the Word made flesh. Our verse today is a simplified form of the message of salvation in the Old Testament.

The promise to those who hear and act upon the words of Jesus is the pouring out of His Spirit to them. If you desire the fullness of the Spirit, respond to the voice of the LORD; repent and obey. This is not promoting a works-based salvation, but rather describing what happens in the life of anyone who responds in faith to the grace offered through the Word of the LORD (James 2:18, 26).

There is a further promise. The LORD will make His words known to us. We will walk in relationship with Him so that we hear His voice. The Scriptures do not come alive to us until we are willing to hear and be changed. When we are receptive and obedient, our communication with the Holy Spirit begins to develop, as was written of Enoch and Noah, they “walked with God” (Genesis 5:22; 6:9).

Remember: No one likes to be corrected. When we see His reproof as a path to the fullness of God’s Spirit and to know His Word, then we can desire His reproof.

## 8/17 Proverbs 4:7

*7 The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.*

Solomon is the author of most of the proverbs. When he became king in place of his father, David, God asked him what he desired. Solomon asked for understanding to rule the nation. This pleased God, and so God granted his request and promised much more (1 Kings 3:4-10). It is not surprising then that he would tell us that we should be passionate about wisdom and insight.

As we saw in the last devotion, wisdom is analogous to Jesus Christ. Both are said to be before creation and the instrument of creation. Certainly there is a worldly wisdom that has no part in the Lord, and yet we must understand the way the world thinks if we are to communicate in a meaningful way. True wisdom, however, is from God and is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere (James 3:17). It sounds very much like the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Solomon saw that wisdom was worth more than anything the world had to offer. We can see from this that knowing Jesus and letting Him live in you and guide your life is the wisest way to live. Solomon mentions a number of worldly things that promise instant wealth and pleasure, but he wrote that they all lead to ruin. Only wisdom leads to life. Only a life in Jesus and His life in you is truly a life worth living that ends in eternal good.

Consider: Those that are truly wise will let Jesus direct their life. He is wisdom, and His Word is the source of true insight.

## 8/18 Proverbs 5:21-22

*21 For a man’s ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponders all his paths. 22 The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.*

This chapter in the proverbs is about the allurement of an adulteress. She represents any type of addiction or any promise of satisfaction that is outside of the good boundaries God has set for us. God does not forbid things out of some greedy desire to withhold things from us. He forbids what is destructive to our soul. He forbids what is contrary to His good plan. Sin is usually the misuse of some good thing that God has given. Medicine can be good. Overdosing can be deadly. Sex is a gift from God for one couple to enjoy in the confines of marriage. Promiscuity destroys intimacy and the deep joy of relationship.

Our verses for today tell us that God is always aware of all that we do. There is a children’s song with the lyrics, “Be careful little hands what you do. There’s a Father up above looking down with tender love, so be careful little hands what you do.” God is watching in love and love will discipline the child who runs toward danger after being warned not to do so. It is a healthy spiritual practice to realize God’s presence in all that we do and say. We should always be asking ourselves if God is pleased with our actions.

The verse for today includes a warning that sin enslaves. Addictions always demand more. What satisfied the flesh the last time must be increased the next time. Eventually it leads to complete enslavement of the mind and body. Instead of living for our Creator, we end up living for greater pleasure while throwing restraint to the wind. The chapter is telling us to be satisfied with the good things God has given us within the boundaries He has set. That is the way of genuine joy and blessing.

Consider: Temptations are lies that promise fulfillment but end in ruin.

## 8/19 Proverbs 6:6

*6 Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.*

Solomon warns us that we can slip into a life of slothfulness and find ourselves in a life of poverty. If we just indulge in sleep and taking it easy, we can get by for a while, but eventually it will catch up with us. We will be begging for food.

I remember in my early teen years working a summer job to try to make some spending money. A nearby resident asked me to come and scratch the thatch from her yard with a rake. It was a very hot day and the humidity was high. I made a half-hearted effort and didn’t seem to break it loose at all. This dear 80-year-old woman took the rake from my hand and used a little muscle and showed me how lazy I was being. As a young teen that considered myself to be a young man, I was embarrassed to see this elderly woman put me to shame. I gave it my all, sweat a lot, and got the job done, but never forgot the lesson.

This is why Solomon tells us to learn from the ant. You see them scurrying around looking for food whenever the weather is good so that they will have it stored for times of bad weather. The apostle Paul tells us that Jesus said it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). He told the church to support older widows who had worked all their life to be a blessing to the saints (1 Timothy 5:9-10). He warned the church not to feed those who refused to work (2 Thessalonians 3:10). All believers should have this Biblical work ethic. The Lord encouraged us to be generous (Matthew 5:42), but wisdom also teaches us not to enable those who insist on living in ungodly lifestyles.

Consider: To help the needy is to be Christ-like. To enable the lazy is unscriptural. The Christian should be diligent at work so that he or she can have to give to those who are truly in need.

## 8/20 Proverbs 11:13

*13 Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.*

Gossip and slander are powerfully seductive temptations. They hold the greatest power over those who lack confidence in their place in God. By putting down another, person it is wrongly believed that we exalt our self. By sharing another’s secrets, we think we impress others with our inside knowledge. In reality, we are warning people not to confide in us.

One of the first things that we must learn as men and women of faith is our position in Jesus Christ. When we realize how much we are loved, the place in heaven that is ours, and all that we possess in Jesus, we no longer need to go about trying to obtain the respect of man. We are secure and at peace, and our behavior is in accordance with what we believe by faith. We value the souls of those that confide in us, and know how destructive sharing their secrets could be. Our lips are guarded by our fear of the LORD and our love for one another.

Those that gossip are seeking to impress people to gain their respect. It may gain the respect of those in darkness, but not from the children of light. The trustworthy soul knows the motivations behind slander and gossip and knows them to be a trap.

Consider: If you struggle with slander or gossip, take a few months of your life to meditate on who you are in Christ. The letter to the Ephesians is a good place to start. Go through it slowly making notes on who the letter declares believers to be. “In Jesus I am …” Then review it daily, considering what it means to your soul each day. You will find your acceptance in Jesus eliminates the need to impress others.

## 8/21 Proverbs 12:15

*15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.*

Pride is such a curse! It seems that everyone is sure he or she is right and those of another opinion are just ignorant or stubborn. It is true in politics, theology, and even within families. It is hard to find the gentle soul that tries to find common ground and learn the reasons behind other opinions. It is even rarer to find someone who genuinely seeks advice, but this verse calls that person a wise man. Man just seems to think he knows it all, but this verse calls him a fool.

I have seen the inability to hear the other side played out in numerous arenas. It usually ends in animosity and division. Sometimes those on both sides are saying the same things in a different way, but their pride prevents them from seeing it. In those scenarios, both sides lose because they are too prideful to listen and learn. Instead of hearing what is said, they take the opposition’s remarks as a personal attack and become even more inflexible to defend their egos.

Humility is such a blessing! People with humble souls realize and note their own errors. This gift helps them to maintain that humility that weighs the advice of others and consider their words. That humility lessens trust in self and looks to the Lord for guidance and wisdom, which often comes through others. They always welcome correction from God’s Word, which is the only trustworthy arbitrator of truth. This makes the wise person even wiser. They are people of peace and reconciliation. How the world needs these gentle people today!

Consider: You may not be that humble person now, but the Spirit of the Lord will transform you, if you will begin to allow Him to correct you. The next time differences arise, be determined to listen to the Lord before you speak. Look for truth in what people are saying. Endeavor to understand their viewpoints.

## 8/22 Proverbs 15:1

*1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

When we are verbally attacked, when the volume of another’s voice rises, we can easily ride the wave of anger by raising our own voice. The volley of words is like rocks thrown back and forth trying to defeat the other person. The intensity only seems to increase. Solomon is telling us that we can stop it right at the beginning.

My wife is gifted at this way of diffusing tension. When we had a business and someone came in to complain about a product, the product was usually just fine. It was the user that had the problem. If I pointed that out, it would only make them angrier. They would think we were trying to cheat them. But when my wife sympathized with the customer’s problems, walked them through the use of the product, showed them how it was to be used, and then gave them the option of trying it again or getting their money back, they would take the product with appreciation and leave with a smile on their faces.

Sometimes the attacks can be quite personal. Even if we are not in the wrong, we can apologize for any misunderstandings and try to understand what upset other people (Proverbs 18:2). Raising your voice just increases the likelihood that they will raise theirs. A calm and reasoned response will usually calm them down. The humble soul will win the day by diffusing the anger. The prideful person may think they have won the argument and gotten satisfaction. That’s ok. The peacemakers have just shown themselves to be children of God.

Consider: If you have a short fuse, remember that when anger takes over you have already lost. The Spirit gives us the fruit of self-control. Exercise it!

## **8/23 Proverbs 17:9**

*9 Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.*

Letting go of offenses and forgiving is a difficult task. Our sinful nature is easily wounded by words or actions. Once wounded, we tend to go over and over the memory of those words or deeds. It’s like repeatedly watching an old movie that makes us angry. We can tell the story word for word to anyone who will listen. Every time we do, the wound is as fresh as if it just happened.

Having counseled a number of married couples, I watched this proverb fulfilled again and again. Even though one person is warned that if they can’t forgive they will eventually separate, they continue to bring up the same old event that happened years before. It’s like a movie that automatically begins again as soon as it ends. Over and over again they open the wound in their hearts as if it somehow made the spouse suffer for the wrong that was done. It either ends in divorce or two people in the same house living in separate lives (Proverbs 18:19).

Gossip separates friends as well. Love will cover the offense with forgiveness and grace. Those who love will remember the forgiveness and grace Christ has shown them and refuse to go over and over the painful event or ever bring it up. Those who love remember their own sins and the grace their friends have shown them. It puts the offense in the past to never be brought up again. It may not be possible to completely forget, but it is possible to forgive by the grace of God. It is possible to refuse to dwell on it or bring it up again. It is demonstration of your love for God and spiritual maturity (Proverbs 19:11).

Consider: Isn’t it good to know that the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for our sins has forever covered all our offenses toward God! That covering makes it possible for us to be friends of God.

## 8/24 Proverbs 18:10

*10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.*

The theologian Stephen Charnock defines “the name of the LORD” as the sum of God’s attributes. The name represents all that He is. Solomon was not telling us that the name of the LORD was a magic term that protects us. He is encouraging us to find refuge and peace in the very nature of God. When trouble comes into our lives we can turn our thoughts to the character of God. Remind yourself of how He helped the people of Scripture to endure. Remember that He is omniscient. That means He is right there with you and is fully aware of all that is happening to you. Nothing escapes Him.

Then recall that God is omnipotent. He has the power needed to either turn the situation around or to help you through it. It may seem impossible to you, and it may appear that the enemy of your soul is prevailing. That doesn’t change the fact that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purposes (Romans 8:28). He is more than able to bring victory out of what appears to be defeat (Romans 8:37).

When your soul is overwhelmed, run to the character and faithfulness of God. As your remind yourself of who He is and what He can do, you will find peace in the storm. The truth will become impenetrable walls of a fortress guarding your heart and mind. Your faith will soar and your soul will be encouraged. That is what Solomon means by today’s succinct proverb.

Challenge: In the back of your Bible put a blank sheet of paper. As you read of a description of God or see His nature in a narrative, write it down with the reference. You have seen a number of God’s attributes in this devotion and previous ones. Remember steadfast love and faithfulness? That sheet will be handy for you to turn to when difficulties come your way.

## 8/25 Proverbs 22:6

*6 Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.*

Making disciples of all the world begins at home. It is our responsibility to demonstrate the love and justice of our heavenly Father to our children. Many adults have a great difficulty thinking of God as a father because of the horrible example set by their earthly father. A loving, involved, and caring earthly father goes a long way in drawing the child toward their heavenly Father.

When Apostle Paul lists the qualifications for elders in the New Testament, he says they must keep their children in submission (1 Timothy 3:4). Real love will discipline, but will do so with a broken heart. Lack of discipline or heartless discipline will drive the child from a relationship with the Lord.

Times of prayer and devotional thoughts from Scripture should be a part of your family’s routine. The children should see you in your own personal times of prayer and devotion, not because you do it for them to see, but because it is your godly habit. If spiritual disciplines are not a part of your life, how can you teach your children to practice them?

Regular church and Bible study attendance is on the wane in America and along with it is a cultural decline. I often find the parents saying that they don’t want to force their children to go, or taking them to a different church where they simply play games. Listening to Biblical preaching or a Scripture centered Sunday school and talking about it after the service and throughout the week will give your older children a hunger for God’s word. They will resist, but it is part of their spiritual training.

Consider: It is a parent’s greatest joy to lead their children to pray for salvation and a relationship with Jesus. That is just the beginning. Then we must help them see what that means by our daily lives.

## 8/26 Proverbs 27:6

*6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.*

Man is born selfish. As he matures he learns to disguise that selfishness to get what he desires from others. The more worldly people become, the better they are at manipulating others. The reason we fall for their flattery is based on our own selfish nature. Finance frauds lure people in with the promise of big returns. The philanderer lures women by telling them what their hearts have longed to hear about themselves. That is the sin nature we all inherited from Adam.

The only way to be freed from this disgusting bondage, whether abuser or victim, is to know Jesus as Savior. He sets us free from the bondage of sin. He transforms our hearts to be enabled to give rather than receive. It is the love of the Father that has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). Life becomes about God and His glory and loving those made in His image.

This love will speak the truth in love to those who need correction. The person who is in Christ will care more about a friend’s soul than they do about the friendship. They will be willing to risk the friendship to keep the friend from destruction. Of course it is expressed with wisdom and gentleness. The heart after God will want all praise to go to God. They will be willing to lovingly tell a sinner the destructiveness of the path that person is taking.

Prayer: LORD, help me to know and experience the freedom from selfishness I have when I live each day in You. Help me to recognize it in my own heart so that I may be neither a manipulator nor a victim. Fill my heart with Your love.

## 8/27 Proverbs 29:25

*25 The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.*

Fear of man can paralyze a person. It can shut our mouths when we would speak. It can cause us not to act when God requires us to take action. It is a trap to keep us from doing God’s will and being effectively used to advance His kingdom. When the Lord sends us, we should not fear man. The psalmist told us that when the Lord is on our side, we should not fear. What can man do to us (Psalm 118:6; Hebrews 13:6)? Whatever man does is allowed by God and in the final analysis will be for our good.

The fear of man sometimes causes us to take unnecessary precautions. The fear is a trap, but the fearful might set traps to protect themselves. The problem is that traps don’t always catch the intended person. If you know you are in the Lord’s will, proceed with boldness and confidence in God. He is more than able to see you through whatever comes. Faith in Him is a witness of the truth of your message (Philippians 1:28).

The opposition may harm your body, but these people can’t touch your soul. To be safe does not mean escaping physical harm. If that were the case there wouldn’t be a single martyr, and the heroes of Hebrews 11 would never have been victorious in the face of difficulties. Safety is your soul secure in God as you continue to place your faith in Him regardless of what comes your way. It is confidence in the power and wisdom of God who is directing you without fearing any human opposition. The righteous are as bold as a lion (Proverbs 28:1).

Prayer: LORD, help me to trust your wisdom and power. Free me from the fear of man. When I am acting at your direction, give me holy boldness that testifies of the faith You have given me.

## 8/28 Proverbs 31:30

*30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*

Charm can be a learned skill to make a person seem more friendly and gracious than they really are. Only by spending time with a person in his or her daily life can you see the real person. Beauty is meaningless. The most beautiful person can be a beast in his or her heart. Beauty is often accompanied with a demanding spirit of pride. If outward beauty is not accompanied with inward beauty, it is a trap for those who idolize looks.

Wealthy men are often seen accompanied with a “trophy wife.” The beautiful women on their arms are meant to be a symbol of their success. In reality, it is a symbol of the vanity of seeking satisfaction in this world. It isn’t long before we read of their divorce and the large settlement the woman receives. The reason the pattern is repeated time and time again is that man is fallen and seeks satisfaction from a fallen world. Instead of enjoying the simple pleasures that are a gift from God, man often wants to fill the emptiness in the heart with created things instead of the Creator.

True beauty in a woman is the fear of the LORD. She weighs her actions so as to be pleasing to Him. She speaks, not to deceive, but to be His servant and bring light to situations. Her beauty is inward and eternal. Her love is unselfish and genuine. This is a woman that should be the role model, but the world will always prefer the deceitful and vain.

Consider: Young man, now you know what to look for in a woman. Young woman, now you know what is truly of value. Older person, make this clear to your children and it will be a blessing to you.

## 8/29 Ecclesiastes 2:24-25

*24 There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, 25 for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?*

This book of wisdom is attributed to Solomon. His main theme is that though he was able to pursue every possible course of pleasure, and found every one was vanity. Several times he tells us that it is the simple pleasures that are a gift from God for everyone (Ecclesiastes 3:13,22; 5:18; 8:15). He calls the other pursuits “chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:14; 2:17; 4:4; 6:9). To be satisfied in the simple pleasures of life, as well as being grateful for them, are a gifts from God.

Whatever our calling or occupation, we can find enjoyment in our toil, or we can dwell on disappointments and other longings. Coveting what other people have or do is the sure path to depression. Solomon had the wealth to try anything and everything, but he kept coming back to the same conclusion. Enjoy your work, your food, and the goodness of God.

I have had the opportunity to spend time in rural areas that still practiced an agrarian lifestyle. One thing perplexed me. These simple people who labor from sun up to sundown had such big smiles on their faces. What were they so joyful about? They had learned to find enjoyment in their toil, food, and drink. They saw them as a gift from God. They enjoyed the interactions with their neighbors and helping one another in times of need. They enjoyed the winter season of rest and the company of neighbors and family. Perhaps the high rate of depression in advanced societies comes from forgetting these simple pleasures are gifts from God.

Consider: Whatever your occupation or calling, focus on the joys in it and the provision of your food and drink. Recognize it as a gift from the hand of God. And when your heart begins to wander, remember Solomon already tried it. Don’t chase the wind.

## 8/30 Ecclesiastes 7:2

*2 It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.*

Pastors have the responsibility to marry and bury. When I began in ministry, I did not look forward to officiating at funerals. Now I value the responsibility and opportunity to speak when we are celebrating the past life of a believer. It is the one time when their friends and family, who don’t know what it is to have the comfort of salvation, stop long enough to consider their own mortality.

We know we will all die. What will be said about us? What did we really accomplish? Did we touch any lives enough for them to want to say something? Then the unbeliever has to consider what motivated our love. They also have to face the fact that their belief system does not deal with death in the way Christianity does. We have a wonderful hope based on Jesus’ statements and His verification of those statements (John 11:25).

The loss we mourn is a temporary one. We know that when we pass we are instantly present with the LORD in all His glory. We know the work in us will be complete (1John 3:2). The grief of temporary separation of those we leave behind is mixed with the joy of knowing our struggles are over, and we are face to face with Jesus. The world sees that joy and lays it to heart. I believe one of the greatest opportunities to share the gospel to a postmodern culture is at the funeral

of a Christian.

Consider: Will your memorial service be an opportunity for the unbeliever to hear the difference that knowing Jesus makes in a life? Have you written down what you want shared at your funeral? Consider doing that and leaving it with your pastor or with your will. Then it will be a “Last Will and Testimony.”

## 8/31 Song of Songs 1:4

*4 Draw me after you; let us run. The king has brought me into his chambers. OTHERS We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine; rightly do they love you.*

The Song of Songs is thought to be a love poem between Solomon and his bride. As Solomon is the son of David and the consummate Son of David is Jesus, it is also seen as the love of Christ and His bride, the church. The apostle Paul believed that the love of a husband and wife pictured that of Christ and all believers (Ephesians 5:32).

Our verse for today is in the voice of the bride. If you are a follower of Jesus, it can be your voice. It is the lovesick bride wanting to be alone with her man. She asks Him to draw her after Him. She does not want the distraction of others to hinder them. She longs to hurry to a place where they can be alone together. The others sing a chorus. They are joyful and rejoicing in the King. They value His love more than wine. They know it is only right to love Him.

There are many aspects to our relationship with our Savior. He directs our lives. He corrects us. He reveals God to us. He calls us His brothers and sisters. But helps us to never forget that we are His bride. What is described here is the passion of young love. That is the passion we should have to be with Him. This is our time in prayer and God’s Word. We are often busy with our daily routine, and we do see Him in the details of each day, but we long to be alone with Him without distraction so that we can share our hearts and hear His.

Consider: If this does not describe your time in the Word and prayer, what is missing? Talk to Him about it right now. Perhaps you did not realize how much He longs to be alone with you.

September

## 9/1 Song of Songs 4:7

*7 You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you.*

As we read this poem as a love poem from Christ Jesus to us His bride, many of the lines are hard to receive. How could He see such beauty in us? How could He have such desire for us? We look at our sinfulness and see ourselves as darkened just as the girl in the poem (Song of Songs 1:6). But at the same time she recognized that she was lovely. How can that be?

When we come to Christ, though our sins are as scarlet, He makes them white as snow (Isaiah 1:18). He covers our ugliness with His beauty. He exchanges our sins for His righteousness. He takes this girl that is rejected and scorned and sees what He can do in her. He sees the bride, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God (Revelation 21:2).

The enemy of our soul wants us to dwell on what we were before our salvation. Every time the old nature rises in us and pretends to be alive and well, the accuser of the brothers and sisters is right there to tell us we are worthless and should give up following Christ. Maybe you’ve heard the accuser lately, either in your mind or from a person. He wants to see you discouraged and feeling defeated. But listen to Jesus. He sees the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). He says you are altogether beautiful, flawless!

Believe: God has promised to finish the work He has begun in you (Philippians 1:6) Every time you consider this wonderful truth, give thanks to God.

## 9/2 Isaiah 1:13

*13 Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations- I cannot endure iniquity and*

*solemn assembly.*

Ritualism gives God no satisfaction at all. In fact, He abhors it! This verse describes worship functions that were part of God’s direction for worship for the nation of Israel. The people were commanded to worship in this manner, but they were also commanded to have a circumcised heart, which is a heart tender toward God (Deuteronomy 10:12-21).

Isaiah prophesied to the nation shortly before Assyria came to take the northern tribes captive. It would have dire consequences for Judah as well. The reason for God’s wrath was His children’s unfaithfulness to Him. It was not unfaithfulness in worship ritual, but unfaithfulness to live out what their worship represented. The land was filled with injustice, oppression, violence, and rebellion against God.

Worship in all its forms, including singing, giving, preaching, and study of God’s Word, must be done with hearts that are surrendered to live as God would have us live. Love for God and love for our fellow man is to be our priority. Without these, God abhors our acts of worship. They are hypocritical and lead others to think it is meaningless to worship God. It can drive people away from the true God instead of inviting them to come to know Him.

Consider: Whenever we gather for public worship, let us examine our hearts to be sure they are surrendered to live according to what our worship is declaring. When God reveals our words of worship are not in conformity with our lives, let us commit to letting His Spirit bring into conformity with His Word.

## 9/3 Isaiah 5:20

*20 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!*

New life in Christ results in one’s eyes seeing the world as it really is. You begin to notice that as people view the same statistics or situations, they come to opposite conclusions. You will see people accusing others of the things they are guilty of. You notice that many attempt to justify perversion and evil behavior. More effort is made to see that criminals have their rights protected than to see that the victim is restored. Everywhere you look, group-thinking trumps reason.

Illogical and contradictory statements abound. Consider for a moment the ridiculous statement, “There are no absolutes.” Is that not an absolute? People will quote a verse from the Bible to defend their position of not believing the Bible. When something happens in your life they can tell you it is the bad result of your faith, while dismissing the fact that the same thing happened to them. While lauding a culture that is based on another religion, they enjoy the benefits of the one that was founded by Christians. And those that recognize their own duplicity then rewrite history to say those founding fathers of the United States were not Christians while ignoring these men’s own writings that declare they were.

God summed it up in our verse for today. The world will call good evil and will call evil good. They call darkness light and light darkness. Jesus said they love darkness rather than light because their acts are evil (John 3:19-20). The early Christians were accused of turning the world upside down. What an illustration of today’s verse. Actually, they were turning it right side up (Acts 17:6).

Consider: As your mind is renewed by God’s Word, the world will increasingly seem to be a foreign land. In the kingdom of God, good is good and light is light!

## 9/4 Isaiah 7:14

*14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*

This is one of the most debated passages of the Bible. Since the first century, Christians have quoted it referring to Mary as the virgin and Jesus as “Immanuel,” which means “God with us.” Matthew 1:23 quotes the verse as being fulfilled at the birth of Jesus. Luke quotes Mary as asking the angel how she can have a child since she is a virgin (Luke 1:34).

The first attack came toward the word “virgin” in the original language in Hebrew. The word could be used of any woman that was of childbearing age. We could argue that the Bible uses the word in the sense of a virgin, but setting that aside, the verse makes no sense if you translate it “young woman.” How would it be a sign for a young woman to have a baby? That is not miraculous.

The second attack came from scholars saying Christians take the passage out of context. On closer examination we can see that Isaiah is speaking of two signs. One is that the house of David will continue, and the sign is that the Messiah will be born of a virgin. When addressing the house of David he uses the plural “you” in Hebrew. Isaiah also speaks of a sign to the king that his enemies will be destroyed. It is regarding Isaiah’s son, Shear-Jashub, and the age of that son. In that case “you” is singular in Hebrew. In chapter eight verse 18 Isaiah declares plainly that it is his children who are the signs of what is coming, not Immanuel. He also calls the nation Immanuel's land (Isaiah 8:8). Isaiah tells us the Messiah will be a son that is given to us; He will be called Mighty God (Isaiah 9:6). Those who say Matthew took this out of context actually are taking it out of context.

Remember: Matthew was correct and inspired when he quoted this verse. The Virgin Mary of the house of David bore Jesus, “God with us.” The Word of God will always be attacked and misinterpreted by those who do not want to bow their knee to its author.

## 9/5 Isaiah 8:12-13

*12 “Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. 13 But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.*

I can’t count all the conspiracies I have heard in my life, Luminata, grassy knoll, chemical contrails, aliens, and dozens more. Conspiracies excite the soul with what it believes to be knowledge the common person doesn’t have. Sometimes conspiracies instill a fear that has no basis in fact. They can cause people to make unwise and rash decisions while distracting them from what is truly important. It is because the world only has hope in this life that they so fear its end.

What the world should fear is the LORD and His final judgment on each of us. That would cause us to consider our ways and turn us from evil. One in a thousand conspiracies may be based in some fact, but the final judgment is certain. The end of every life is certain. What will God say of your life?

While we who love Him are certain of His great love for us, we also dread His discipline in this life for our disobedience. Even the believers will stand before the judgment seat of God to give an account of their lives (Romans 14:10). Our fear of God is not regarding condemnation, but regarding what could have been had we fully obeyed. Isaiah is telling Israel and us that our focus should be on the holiness of God rather than the latest conspiracy. The people of the world fear conspiracies because their hope is in this life, while we fear God because our hope is in eternity.

Consider: The next time someone tells you of a conspiracy, consider sharing this verse with him or her.

## 9/6 Isaiah 12:2

*2 “Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.”*

The last half of the verse is a quotation from Moses (Exodus 15:2). Isaiah is using the quote to prove that what he is saying in the first half of the verse is true. Those who know God as their Savior can trust and not fear. That is because God is their strength and the song of their lives. They don’t rely on their own ability or power. They rely on the One who has all power. Their souls are not filled with songs of temporal satisfaction or pain, but rather of the One who has become their Savior.

In the original language of Hebrew, the beginning of our verse for today is a revelation. God (El – the mighty Creator) is my salvation (Yeshua – the name of Jesus)! Sometimes I hear people ask, “If Jesus is the Messiah, why doesn’t the Old Testament make it clear?” Well, it does, over and over again. From types and shadows to direct prophecies, to specific statements, the Old Testament tells us that Jesus, our Messiah, is God.

Notice that Isaiah had a very personal God that he claimed as his own. He says, “…the LORD GOD (Yah YHWH) is *my* strength and *my* song, and he has become *my* salvation (Yeshua).” (emphasis added by author) Jesus always is the Savior, but for Isaiah, Jesus had become his personal salvation. There was a point in time when Isaiah was saved by his forward looking faith that God would provide atonement for his sins. Isaiah entered into a personal relationship with God (“my salvation”) and found God to be his strength and his song.

Consider: What is your source of strength? What is the song of your life?

## 9/7 Isaiah 12:3

*3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.*

This verse immediately follows yesterday’s verse. Centuries after it was written, during the time of Christ, it was sung by a priest as he drew water from the pool of Siloam and brought it up a staircase to the Temple. Then he would bring it to the bronze altar where he would meet another priest with a pitcher of wine. They would circle the altar seven times on the last day of the Feast of Booths. Then they would raise the pitchers high and pour the water and wine out on the altar. It was to symbolize the hope of the coming rains and the ultimate pouring out of the Spirit.

It was sometime on that last day of the feast that Jesus shouted out, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37-38). It seems obvious to me that Jesus read these verses with His name (salvation = “Jesus” in Hebrew) and knew the Spirit through Isaiah was referring to Him. It is the same thing he told the woman at the well, only there He said it would spring up unto eternal life (John 4:14). Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit that everyone was looking forward to in that water and wine ceremony (John 7:39).

Are you thirsty? Later in Isaiah, the LORD will ask that same question. He invites all who are thirsty to come to Him and drink. Jesus was declaring Himself to be the source of the Spirit and eternal life, one with the Father.

Consider: The world will never satisfy our spiritual thirst. Jesus invites us to joyfully draw water for our spiritual thirst from the well of Yeshua (Jesus).

## 9/8 Isaiah 14:13-14

*13 You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’”*

Isaiah was prophesying about the king of Babylon, but suddenly refers to him as the Day Star, which is a name for Lucifer. The fall of the king of Babylon is being compared to Satan’s fall. We get an insight into the origin of Satan from this prophecy.

In today’s verses we see there are five “I wills” found in Satan’s heart. Count them. Satan’s vanity caused him to desire to take the very throne of God. Of course that is impossible. Satan does not have the power to sustain creation. He is a created being. He desired to be worshiped by mankind. Many do worship him, but they wouldn’t if they knew the end result, for he is not love. His demands are for himself and not for our good.

He desired to be like God, the Most High. He does not want to be God, for God is love, faithful, merciful, kind, and holy. He simply wants God’s power and ability. But the created can never attain to the infinite attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. The passion for power and honor drove Satan from heaven. His sin was pride. It is the source of most sins. It is lifting up self against the goodness of God by demanding our ways and rejecting His good ways. It is a sin we are so prone to repeat.

Remember: God gives us instruction for our good. Pride that exalts itself against God’s will is self-destructive in the end.

## 9/9 Isaiah 25:8

*8 He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.*

Death is the final outcome of sin. Jesus swallowed up death forever when He took the sins of the world upon Himself at Calvary. Why do we die then? Though He died for our future sins as well as our past, we are still experiencing sin and its wages (Romans 6:23). When His work in us is complete and the curse of sin is lifted from the earth, there will be no more death. No longer will we say good-bye to those we love. Decay will be a part of the previous age.

The imagery of the LORD wiping away the tears from all faces is such a comforting thought. One of the last coherent conversations I had with my mother before her death was about this very thing. The misunderstandings, unforgiveness, and alienation will be over forever. Her response was, “I want to go now.” It was only a few days later she experienced the touch of His hand wiping the pain-filled tears away forever.

The LORD’S people have always been a reproach to the world. We just don’t fit in. Our right-side-up lives challenge an upside-down world, which results in persecution, insults, slander, and sometimes even death. But when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our LORD and His Christ (Revelation 11:15), the reproach will be no more. In place of reproach will be glory and honor.

Consider what a wonderful future God has planned for us.

## 9/10 Isaiah 28:16

*16 therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’”*

This verse is quoted by Peter and Paul in the New Testament as a prophecy of Jesus (Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:6). They combined the prediction of Jesus with another verse: “Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.” Isaiah transcribed this passage as God speaking to the corrupt rulers of Jerusalem who thought they would escape the judgment that God was sending.

Before addressing the rulers, God spoke to any who would listen. Only those who trusted in the Word of God would not have to flee in haste. The tried, precious, and sure cornerstone is God’s Word. It is truth. It was incarnated in Jesus, and that is why the New Testament authors felt free to change the wording of the promise and apply it to Jesus. “Put to shame” comes from Isaiah 49:23. Those who wait for the Lord will not be put to shame. In citing these two verses as they did, Peter and Paul were saying they knew Jesus to be the Word, the LORD.

The rulers of Jerusalem in Jesus’ day trusted in lies like the ones in the days of Isaiah. They were swept away by Rome, just as those in Jerusalem were swept away by Babylon. The prophecy is fulfilled again and again. Those who put their trust in Jesus, the Word, the LORD, will be on a sure foundation. Whatever comes, their souls will be safe. Those who reject Him have placed their faith in what cannot save and were warned that they would be swept away by the waters of judgment. Perhaps Jesus was thinking of these passages when He told the parable of the wise man who built his house on the rock and the foolish man that built his on the sand (Matthew 7:24-27).

Consider: It is of utmost importance to know where your faith is placed. Is it in the tested, sure, and precious Word of God or in the lies of this world?

## 9/11 Isaiah 30:20

*20 And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher.*

This is one of the many prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. Though Israel was about to face its demise as a nation and go into captivity, the Lord gave them a glorious hope for the future. It was a word from God that they could cling to through the most difficult of times. It is hard to imagine watching your kindred starve, and then finally being conquered, leaving all your worldly goods behind and marching to a strange land not knowing what lay ahead.

The One who had taught them the ways of the LORD was the LORD through His prophets. The LORD was their teacher. He was teaching them through this difficulty that serving other gods only leads to destruction. They had clung to images of gods that they could see, rather than the invisible God whose manifestation over the Ark of the Covenant was only seen once a year by the high priest.

What did God mean when He said their eyes would behold their Teacher? It could mean nothing less than the God-incarnate Messiah, Jesus. The attributes and nature of God would be seen in a man. He would continue to teach them the way of the LORD, holiness, righteousness, mercy, and love. Everything He did and said would show them God. Then their choice would not be an invisible God or an idol you can see, but man they could relate to that showed the greatest love ever seen versus an image made of stone or wood.

Consider: We have seen Him in the gospels. We, too, must choose between our Teacher and the things of this world.

## 9/12 Isaiah 40:10-11

*10 Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. 11 He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.*

The first coming of Jesus was in meekness and humility to provide Himself as the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. His demonstrations of power were in healing that we might know He has power over the fallen condition of man. But when Jesus returns, it will be with might to set up His rule over the whole earth.

Because His nature is just, He will bring the just payment all deserve. His servants will be rewarded for their service, and His enemies will be judged for their sins. All books will be balanced. This is why He told us to lay up our treasure in heaven (Luke 12:33). His reward is infinitely greater than any physical rewards in this life. That is also why He tells us to turn from our sins and be saved

(James 5:20). He has offered to exchange our sins for His righteousness.

This coming in power is not the end of His gentleness. Gentleness toward those that are His will always be present. No wonder Jesus told us that He is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). The gentle way He patiently led His disciples is the same way He leads us all. The immature will be gathered into His arms and carried along. Those who are having a hard time following will be led at a pace they can handle. In His wonderful nature is the power to judge evil, the equity to reward His servants, the gentleness to care for the weakest follower, and the patience to guide us at pace we can follow.

Consider: The wonderful combination of these virtues makes Jesus the perfect Savior. If one was missing, all would be lacking. There is no flaw in Him! If you are struggling today, let Him carry you through it.

## 9/13 Isaiah 41:10

*10 fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

The Assyrians were conquering nation after nation, and it looked like they were on their way to subjugate the entire world. But God spoke to Israel and told them that they were not to fear. They were His chosen people. If God is holding your right hand, you have nothing to fear. Those whom God assists will be victorious.

Though the prophecy was for the descendants of Abraham, it can also apply to all who place their faith in God. He promised to be near those who are of a broken spirit and contrite heart (Psalm 51:17). He holds our right hand (Isaiah 41:13) while upholding us with His right hand. Can you picture that? No wonder we should not fear or be dismayed. The God who upholds the universe is upholding us!

The next time you find yourself wondering how you will endure the circumstances you face, return to this promise. Picture it in your mind once again. Meditate on the “I will” promises. He will strengthen you, help you, and uphold you with His right hand. If God is with us, who can be against us? Regardless of what happens, He will see us through. The cross of Jesus looked like the end of His ministry and the defeat of all that was good. No circumstance could appear darker, but they brought about the greatest spiritual victory in history. God took hold of the lifeless right hand of Jesus and upheld and strengthened His body even as He transformed it into an eternal body.

Remember: Whatever you are facing, don’t be dismayed. Trust in the presence of God with you to see you through to victory!

## 9/14 Isaiah 42:6-7

*6 “I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, 7 to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.*

This is one of a number of Isaiah’s suffering-servant songs. The Messiah, Jesus, is referred to as God’s righteous servant. He is the only One that was truly righteous when God called Him to take on the task of redeeming fallen mankind. This chapter immediately follows our passage from yesterday. In that passage God promised to take hold of the hand of His children. In this passage, He promises to take the Messiah by the hand. It is comforting to know that just as God held the hand of Jesus and walked with Him, He will take our hand and walk with us.

God did keep Jesus from all the plots against His life. The final covenant with man was made in Jesus’ blood. The previous covenants that were sealed in blood all looked forward to this final covenant in the sinless blood of Christ. His life-blood paid the just penalty for our sins. His words, life, death, and resurrection are a light to the nations. The world has been in the darkness of false religions that offer no true hope. The light of the gospel is liberating them and bringing them into an eternal covenant with God through Jesus. Our bondage to false beliefs and to sin is broken by the power of His Spirit and we are released from our self-imposed prisons. We were blind, but now we see.

Having traveled to many third-world countries, I can tell you that the believers in those countries shine with the light of Jesus. Those who are still in the darkness of the prisons of false beliefs see the light on the believers’ faces and are coming to Jesus. Those blinded by their sin are seeing for the first time. The fields are white unto harvest. When this gospel is preached in all the world as a witness to all people, then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

Consider: No matter what culture you live in, if Christ is your life, you are a light to those who sit in darkness. Shine!

## 9/15 Isaiah 43:10

*10 “You are my witnesses,”declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.*

Israel and the Messiah (my servant) were to be witnesses to the truth of one true God, the LORD. If they had stayed faithful to Him and to His word, the world would have seen the blessing of God upon them and been persuaded the He alone is our Creator. This was the reason God disciplined them so severely when they turned to idols. Idolatry distorted the message. They had to learn there was but one God.

Even when God’s chosen people were weaned from idols, they made their obedience an idol by adding rules to God’s Word so they would not break it. Instead of seeing His loving heart, they focused on not being punished again. They treated other people with contempt which repelled them from the God of Israel.

Since Israel failed to be the witness that drew the nations to the truth, God sent His servant to be a faithful witness. The life of Jesus flawlessly showed the love and justice of God. His death on the cross for all mankind showed His love with impartiality. His life, words, and resurrection were for us to know, believe, and understand that the LORD alone is God. There is none before Him and there will be none after Him.

Consider: Is your life demonstrating that the LORD alone is God?

## 9/16 Isaiah 45:11

*11 Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and the one who formed him: “Ask me of things to come; will you command me concerning my children and the work of my hands?*

When reading the Scriptures, it is of utmost importance to understand the context. In one fringe group of believers, I was given a memory-verse list that backed up their doctrine. This verse was one on the list, however, we were memorizing from the King James Version. There it was translated, “Concerning the works of my hands, command thou me.” Based on that mistranslation, we would command God to do what we thought was good.

The context of the passage shows the ESV and NIV translations to be more accurate. God was expressing His sovereign authority over all His creation. He asked what right a clay pot had to argue with its maker. Our verse for today is telling us that it is the height of arrogance to tell God what to do. He makes what

He wants to make. He sees what we could never begin to see or understand. That is why we add to our prayers, “…nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42b). Father does know best.

My grandson was born with a cleft palate. I really didn’t know what to make of it until I read in Exodus 4:11, “Who made man’s mouth?” God was questioning Moses’ complaint regarding his inability to speak well. I realized that God makes us the way we are for His good purposes. Clay has no right to argue with its maker. God is sovereign over all. Accept it, and know that He will use everything for His glory. You can trust Him to do all His works in wisdom and love.

Remember: God knows what He is doing. We don’t have to understand, but we do need to trust.

## 9/17 Isaiah 49:6

*6 he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”*

In this chapter, God calls His servant, Israel. When you try to share the suffering servant songs of Isaiah with Jews, they will tell you that their rabbi teach that the servant is Israel. Our verse for today tells us that the Servant raises up the tribes of Jacob (Israel’s old name) and brings back the preserved of Israel. They don’t bring themselves back or raise themselves up, so who is this new Israel. Israel means “one who prevails with God.” Revelation 5:5 tells us that the Lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered. Jesus has prevailed over sin and death. He has prevailed so that mercy might triumph over judgment (James 2:13).

Jesus not only raises up the Jews, such as the apostles, and brings back the preserved of Israel after they were scattered over the earth, but He has become a light to the world. Every nation on earth has heard the Gospel. God’s salvation (which is what Jesus’ name means) has reached the end of the earth! Even this very devotional thought is going out to the end of the world as part of the fulfillment of this verse. While you are reading this in America, someone is reading it in South America, Asia, Africa, the islands of the sea, and everywhere the internet is available. God’s salvation, Jesus, is touching lives in every remote corner of the planet.

He is our light (John 1:9). We were in darkness, but the One who is the light of the world is illumining our hearts with His truth. He is making us His lights to share with those in darkness the victory He has won for them. His children are obeying His command and going to the uttermost parts of the earth with the good news of what Jesus has done for us (Acts 1:8). That is a demonstration that God does indeed love the world; and at the same time, He loves you personally.

Consider: You are living in an age when more people are living than at any other time in history. The gospel is reaching out to those billions of people wherever they live. What a privilege to have His Word, a lamp to our feet and a light to our path!

## 9/18 Isaiah 50:4-5

*4 The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. 5 The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward.*

The LORD was addressing the sins of the nation of Judah, but then He asked if He had somehow become powerless to save. At that point the prophecy switches to expressions from the Messiah. God gives Him the words to sustain the weary. That is why He encouraged all who were weary and burdened to come to Him (Matthew 11:28). His words will sustain us.

Where did He get these words that so powerfully touch our souls? Every morning Jesus would find a place to pray and hear from the Father (Mark 1:35). His spiritual ears were awake to hear instruction. Every day was lived in obedience to the Father. God opened His ears to hear and He received and obeyed what He heard.

Why is it that we have such a hard time hearing the voice of the LORD? Jesus told us that His sheep listen to His voice (John 10:3). Could it be that we are not surrendered to obey and therefore our ears are not awakened? If our hearts are determined to do what we want, rather than to obey our LORD, we have rebellious hearts. If we want our ears to be awakened, we must first surrender our hearts to serve in any ways the LORD would direct us.

Consider: If you are weary, Jesus has a word to sustain you. Surrender your heart to do His will and your ear will be awakened. Follow His example.

## 9/19 Isaiah 54:5

*5 For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.*

The LORD is speaking to the remnant of Israel that would return from captivity. However, the apostle Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians that the marital relationship is a picture of Jesus’ relationship with His bride, the called-out ones. Just as the returning Israelites are not to be afraid, ashamed, confounded, or remember the shame of their youth, so the followers of Jesus need not remember their sinful pasts. We don’t need to fear what lies ahead. Our Maker is our husband, and He is the God of the whole earth! The name, “The LORD of hosts” means He commands the army of angels. What can anyone do to us without the LORD’S permission? He is also our Redeemer. He has purchased us from the slave market of sin with His own blood.

The biblical wife was to be the glory of her husband and be his helpmeet. Proverbs 31 gives the description of the ideal wife who tirelessly labors for her family. Brothers and sisters, we can’t escape these duties, for we are the bride of Christ. We are His helpmeet. We are to give ourselves to see Him glorified.

Think about the benefit of having the perfect spouse. All His advice is perfect and helpful. He will never fail to provide. He is able to protect us in every situation. He always has time to listen to our heart. And because the biblical duty of the husband is to love his wife, we can forever count on the steadfast love of the LORD.

Consider: If you have found Christ, you have found your perfect soul mate.

## 9/20 Isaiah 56:7

*7 these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”*

The LORD was speaking to the house of Israel and telling the people to include all Gentiles who wanted to follow the true God of Israel. It was their heart that mattered, and not their nationality. He even promised to give them an everlasting name that was better than that of sons and daughters. This should have completely changed the way Jews looked at their faith.

When Herod renovated the temple, he made a large outer court and called it the Court of the Gentiles. It seems that Herod, an Edomite, understood the passage to some degree and wanted to make himself more acceptable by emphasizing it. In practice, however, the priests made the outer court a place of merchandising. Animals and temple coins were sold there, while traffic cut through this convenient way to get from one side of the city to the other. Prayer would be a difficult task in the midst of all the traffic and vendor noise.

I believe God was speaking of something even more difficult for the Jews to accept. “My house” refers to the temple itself where the altar was and the way into the holy place where priests offered incense and once a year went all the way in to the very presence of God. To think of Gentiles in there was unimaginable. They would be executed for trying to enter. The LORD was predicting the day when the curtain into the Holy of Holies would be torn, and through Jesus we would all have access into God’s presence in prayer. The house of God in heaven is accessible to us who are in Jesus. We can present our requests directly to God. The throne of God in heaven is a house of prayer where we commune with Him.

Consider: What a privilege we have to live these verses and through Jesus to have access directly into the house of prayer in the heavenlies!

## 9/21 Isaiah 57:20-21

*20 But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. 21 There is no peace,”says my God, “for the wicked.”*

In the previous verses, God promised to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. He was promising a time of peace and comfort after His judgments had caused them to face their sins. But some will not learn from His judgments. They continue with rebellious hearts toward God. They can’t be still. They are constantly rehashing the past and blaming God for everything they dislike. Indeed, God may have allowed calamity to turn them from their self-destructive ways, but instead of listening, they became even more obstinate. At times, they even imagine getting even with God by harming those who worship Him.

The peace of God’s children irritates the wicked. Because it is a reminder that their hearts are in turmoil, they will make excuses for it. They will label peace “stupidity,” and call bliss “ignorance,” and other such labels. The wicked are to be pitied because of their lack of peace. They can’t be quiet and enjoy a moment of silence because conviction will trouble them.

Thank the LORD for the peace and comfort He gives us. When we aren’t at peace, we need to be still and search our hearts as to where we have ignored God (Colossians 3:15). God put our eyes on the front of our heads so we would look forward. Forget the past while retaining the lessons and refuse to go back and dig up old mire and dirt. Your spiritual growth and a glorious future are before you.

Remember: You can’t change the past. You can have an effect on the future. Look forward!

## 9/22 Isaiah 58:9

*9 Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,*

The nation of Judah had sunk into a state of idolatry and greed. They still performed their religious rituals but they also worshiped other gods. They would take periods of time and abstain from eating, a fast, to focus on prayer. After sacrificing by going without food, they wondered why their prayers weren’t answered. If you perform a religious duty, isn’t God obligated to give you what you ask?

God called them on their religious hypocrisy. He told them the kind of fast that He desired was not abstaining from food, but to undo heavy burdens, to stop oppressing people, and to break free from wickedness. While they were supposedly in this time of prayer, they would fight and quarrel with others. God said the real reason they were fasting was just to seek something for themselves.

God went on to tell them what He wanted to see them do: feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and get real about their own sins. That’s when He spoke the promise of our verse today. Then He would hear their prayers and commune with them. They needed to stop oppressing people and accusing others and speaking wickedness if they wanted to be in fellowship with God. They needed to take a look at their hearts behind their actions. God does.

Application: We can perform all kinds of religious acts, but God’s heart is not pleased with ritual. He loves mankind. Help your fellow man and think about the needs of others. Examine your own heart, get right with God and He will hear your prayers.

## 9/23 Isaiah 61:10

*10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

This chapter begins with the words that Jesus read in His home synagogue and declared were fulfilled in Him (Luke 4:18-19, 21). He brings good news to the poor and binds up the broken-hearted and declares liberty to the captives. It goes on to describe God’s promises of blessing to a future generation of Israel. Then at this verse the chapter suddenly switches from the LORD speaking to the prophet’s own words.

All who are recipients of the LORD’S blessings can join the prophet’s sentiments. If we are in Jesus we have every reason to rejoice, for our future is eternity in His presence. Our soul should exult in our God. The word “exult” in Hebrew comes from a word that means “to spin around.” It means to be under a violent emotion. Some would have us deny our emotions, and certainly our emotions can lead us astray. However, the prophet is telling us we should have very strong emotions about our God because He has clothed us with salvation. We are clothed in Christ Jesus! He is our robe of righteousness. That is the greatest beauty we could ever hope to have.

Isaiah compares that beauty to a bride and groom on their wedding day. Of course, we are to be the bride of Christ. John echoes this in the Revelation when he says we will be like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband (Revelation 21:1). The most glorious wedding on earth does not compare with the wedding of the ages.

Isaiah also speaks of the beautiful headdress of the priest. Over that headdress was a golden plate upon which is engraved, “Holiness to the LORD” (Exodus 28:36). That means we will be completely His and His alone.

Consider: What a glorious future awaits us. Exult!

## 9/24 Isaiah 66:5

*5 Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at his word: “Your brothers who hate you and cast you out for my name’s sake have said, ‘Let the LORD be glorified, that we may see your joy; but it is they who shall be put to shame.*

Children of God are often the target of religious persecution, and sometimes it comes from those who claim to be of the same faith. Muslims shout, “God is great!” while they kill and maim Christians and sometimes other Muslims as well. Most church fights I have witnessed are simply over who is in charge. But when the religious attack those who are led by the Spirit, you often see those who are led by the Spirit refuse to fight back. They ask God whether to stand their ground or move on. Of course the religious will claim they only have the best interest of the church at heart. There is a book on the subject entitled, *Well-Intentioned Dragons*.

Jesus told His disciples that the time would come when they would be thrown out of the synagogues and even killed by those who think they are serving God (John 16:2) The apostle Paul declared that all who live godly lives will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12). We expect it from the world, but more often than not it is by those who claim to be of the same faith who are threatened by a true believer’s devotion and dedication.

Certainly this was true of Jesus. The religious elite felt He exposed their hypocrisy and undermined their man-made orthodoxy. Those who follow Jesus whole- heartedly should expect the same. Yet, there is a promise in this verse. It is the persecutors who will be put to shame. It may not be until Judgment Day, but the truth will be known. In many cases, we don’t have to wait that long. In the case of Watchman Nee, those who threw him out came humbly back to beg for his return.

Remember: In these kinds of conflicts, you can tell who is on the Lord’s side by their demonstration of the fruits of the Spirit.

## 9/25 Jeremiah 2:8

*8 The priests did not say, ‘Where is the LORD?’ Those who handle the law did not know me; the shepherds transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit.*

As the nation of Judah declined morally, so its priests declined spiritually. There were a few prophets who were the exception. One of the most notable was Jeremiah. The message of the LORD through him was not an easy one to deliver. God had forewarned him that the people would not listen.

The priests weren’t really bothered that the LORD’S presence seemed to be gone. They got use to operating on their own without Him. In fact, it was easier and less convicting. The law could be used to manipulate people for their benefit when the Spirit of the law is ignored. While the shepherds were supposed to lead in the way of righteousness as examples, they instead transgressed against the LORD.

Perhaps worst of all were the prophets who prophesied by false gods. The prophets were to be the voice of God before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Instead they had become the mouthpiece of the demonic. Instead of leading people in the path that leads to spiritual profit, they led them in ways of temporal gain that their hearts lusted after. These behaviors are the death knell of a nation. If they are ringing in your nation, stand firm. Don’t settle for not having His presence, for pastors that don’t know the LORD, or for shepherds that transgress. Don’t associate with the prophets that run after things that don’t profit. Worship the LORD in Spirit and in truth regardless of the direction of the culture in which you live.

Consider: The darker the night, the brighter a candle shines (Matthew 5:14-16).

## 9/26 Jeremiah 6:16

*16 Thus says the LORD: “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’”*

There is a cycle that occurs in nations that have the revealed Word of God. They begin by breaking away from tyranny, crying out to God for help. He delivers them and they seek to do His will in gratitude for their deliverance. When they live according to His will, He blesses them physically and spiritually. As time passes they begin to focus on the material blessings and forget their beginnings. They begin to lose sincerity and vitality in their worship. The next step is to just go through the routines of worship while living for riches.

That is when God must remove the riches and the blessings to bring them back. Sometimes He does this through an enemy nation, and other times He uses adverse weather conditions. The voice of the prophets reminds the people how far they have fallen. The depth of their falling away determines how long it takes to turn them back to God.

This helps pattern helps us understand what is meant by “the ancient paths.” When the children of God came into the land under Joshua’s leadership, they wholeheartedly served the Lord, obeyed His commands, and were blessed. Their souls could once again be at rest if they would only listen and return. Such a return had happened many times in the past.

In Jeremiah’s day they heard his prophetic warning. The enemy was at the gates, but they refused to return to those ancient paths. They were unwilling to leave their idols and return to the Lord. They left God no choice but to send them into captivity (Jeremiah 12:17).

Consider: God will always warn us when we stray, but we must be willing to return to Him. Returning to Jesus is the only place to find rest for our souls (Matthew 11:28-30).

## 9/27 Jeremiah 7:23-24

*23 But this command I gave them: ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.’ 24 But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward.*

God is searching for those who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23). We have His voice. When Jeremiah wrote, it was God’s voice through His prophets that applied the Word of God to a specific people at a specific time. Since Pentecost, we have the voice of the Holy Spirit, that still small voice in our spirit. He does a similar work to what He did through the prophets. He reminds us of the Word and applies it to our lives (John 14:26; 16:13-14).

We also have the written commands of God. The commands are our guidelines. They help us discern whether or not what we are hearing is God’s spirit or our own. They give us our general instructions to help us know when we are in our old nature or our new life in Christ. In this passage, God was saying that they were commanded to obey both His voice and His commands, “that it may be well with you.” God speaks to us for our good. Everything He directs us to do and say is because He loves us and wants the best for us. If we really believed that, our heart would be much more inclined to listen and obey.

At this point in history, the people of Judah refused to obey or even attempt to listen. They did what they thought best for themselves. Their hearts were stubborn and evil. By going their own way, they ended up going backward, away from what was really best for them. To listen to God and obey would have taken them forward to what was ultimately best for them, but they refused.

Consider: Are you going forward or backward?

## 9/28 Jeremiah 18:6

*6 “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.*

The Lord sent Jeremiah to watch a potter at work. The vessel the potter was working on was spoiled, so he made another vessel with the clay. I’ve done a little work with a potter’s wheel. To prepare the clay you have to beat and work it until you get all the air out of the clay. Then you throw it down hard on the wheel and begin to spin and shape it. Sometimes, as the sides of the vessel grow taller, it can either get too thin or out-of-round, and then it starts wobbling. The potter must start again by pounding that clay back into a lump.

This is what Jeremiah observed. The LORD told Jeremiah that Israel was like that clay the potter was working. God intended for the nation to be a light to the world and set it at the crossroads of the nations (Ezekiel 5:5). Instead, it began to wobble and became like the other nations. It was time to take that clay off the wheel (the Promised Land) and pound it into a lump (the trials of captivity) to prepare to reshape it.

This happens to nations, but it also happens to individual lives. When we get too spiritually thin or wobbly, God allows things to come into our lives to turn us back to Him. He is more concerned about our eternal good than our temporal happiness. When we hit the bottom we look up. The pounding may not be over and may go on longer then we’d like, but it is for our good. It will produce a better and more stable vessel the next time around.

Remember: The times we seem to be pounded and smashed and pulled out of our comfort zone are often the beginning of God reshaping us or our nation for our good and His glory. Yield to the pressure from His hands.

## 9/29 Jeremiah 23:28-29

*28 Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? declares the LORD. 29 Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?*

As the nation of Judah came to its final days, numerous false prophets prophesied the deceit of their own hearts. They would dream like we all do, but then make it into more than it was. God proclaimed through Jeremiah that He was against all those who falsely said, “declares the LORD” (Ezekiel 13:2-3). They were causing people to forget His name, not the name itself, but all it represented. God’s name represents justice, righteousness, and holiness, but corruption and innocent blood had filled the land.

In our verses today, God told the dreamer to go ahead and tell his dream, but the prophet who had God’s Word should speak it faithfully. There is no comparison. It’s like the stalk of wheat and the grain head. One is for the fire and the other is nourishment. The Word of God is powerful and exposes the false dreams and phony revelations. It’s the fire that consumes the straw or a hammer that smashes a rock to pieces. Jeremiah had actually stood in the council of God and heard what had to be declared. That powerful word sweeps away all the voices of man. It is the Word that created all things. It is forever settled in the heavens (Psalm 119:89). It rocks our very being and could annihilate us in an instant or raise us from death.

God promised to punish the lying prophets who said, “the burden of the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:32-40). He declared them to be a burden because they perverted the words of the living God, the LORD of hosts. The same is true today. Jesus foretold that many would come in the last days claiming to be the Christ as well as many false prophets. He warned that they would even show great miraculous signs (Matthew 24:24). We’ve been warned. Stay with God’s Word.

Remember: The word of God never changes. It is all-powerful!

## 9/30 Jeremiah 33:15-16

*15 In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 16 In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’*

As with many of the prophecies in Scripture, the restoration of the nation had an immediate fulfillment which occurred at the end of the 70 years of exile, and a much later fulfillment in our day. The Jews have been brought back to Israel from all over the face of the earth. Our passage for today speaks of the millennial kingdom in which Jesus will reign on the earth on the throne of David in a time yet to come.

Only when the Branch of David, Jesus Christ, reigns in Jerusalem will there truly be justice and righteousness. He will return at the time called “Jacob’s Trouble,” and will save the Jews out of a second holocaust. From that time forward, Jerusalem will dwell securely. The end of the Millennium will see the forces of evil influence the world with a final attempt to defeat Jesus. This time, He will not veil His glory. He will bring those who reject Him to the final judgment and sentence them to their eternal fate.

The name by which the LORD will be called is “The LORD is our righteousness.” All those in His kingdom will know that their righteousness comes from His sacrifice for us. We will live in eternal gratitude that He credited us with His righteous life and bore our sin debt on the cross. Even now, for all who have received Him, He is “The LORD our righteousness.”

Consider what great things the LORD has done for you!

October

## 10/1 Lamentations 2:14

*14 Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen for you oracles that are false and misleading.*

Lamentations is a collection of five poems attributed to Jeremiah and written shortly after the fall of Jerusalem. It was an expression of grief over the fall of Jerusalem and of the faithfulness of God even to a faithless people. In today’s verse, Jeremiah reminds the people of one of the reasons for their current state. The prophets of Judah had prophesied false visions. They were telling the people everything was fine and that their attackers would be defeated.

Perhaps worst of all, they failed to expose the iniquity of the people. That was the duty of a prophet, but it was also what made the prophet’s calling a difficult one. Jeremiah was thrown in a pit and then confined for being faithful to expose iniquity. People would much rather hear how things will get better than to hear a list of their sins against God. However, facing the truth and changing their hearts would have restored their fortunes.

Is it any different today? The preachers that preach three feel-good points and a poem often have the largest and most wealthy congregations, while the pastor who points out the sins of his flock has a meager attendance. We need Biblical edification and encouragement, but we also need to hear the truth about our sins. That is the path to having our fortunes restored. This is not simply earthly provision, but spiritual health and walking in the calling God has on our lives.

Consider: Are you in a church that addresses the sins of your culture and encourages you to overcome them, or are you in a feel-good church that shares false and deceptive visions?

## 10/2 Lamentations 3:25-26

*25 The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. 26 It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.*

After one of the most difficult books in the Bible to read, after reading God’s determined judgment and all its severity, we come to the poems of weeping and read that the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases (Lamentations 3:22). It seems contradictory unless we understand that the judgment God delivered came from His steadfast love. It grieves God to see His people worshiping false Gods to their own harm. It pains Him to see the poor abused. His warnings were often framed as pleas to return to Him. That is because His steadfast love never fails.

Those who survived the destruction of Jerusalem were told how they could return to the God of steadfast love and find mercy again. He is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. God doesn’t always answer when we’d like. Souls that have truly placed their trust and hope in Him will not run ahead and try to find a solution outside of the LORD. They will wait expectantly, knowing that His timing is perfect. They surrender themselves to His will because they trust He knows best.

Waiting quietly for His salvation means they aren’t whining about their plight. They know they deserve whatever may come their way and more (Lamentations 3:39), but they also know it is all in the hands of a God whose love is unchanging. It is not easy to wait and look to God in the midst of difficulty, but those who do so have the promise that God will be good to them.

Consider: How do you react to adversity? Will you learn to quietly wait for His salvation as you seek Him?

## 10/3 Ezekiel 7:19

*19 They cast their silver into the streets, and their gold is like an unclean thing. Their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD. They cannot satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it. For it was the stumbling block of their iniquity.*

Greed! It is a plague on the souls of man. Man will do incredible evil to gain wealth. Drug dealers in South America have semi trucks full of money and treasures galore, but when the government swoops in they lose their life along with their treasures. We think it will bring us some kind of security, but when everything falls apart, it is meaningless. Who wants gold when you are starving? What good is gold on the Day of Judgment?

The ones Ezekiel was speaking to had cheated laborers and killed people to gain a little more wealth. When the siege came and there was no bread to be found, all that ill-gotten gain couldn’t fill their empty stomachs. The Babylonians would soon kill them or take them captive, and all that wealth for which they had sold their souls would then belong to their captors.

Ezekiel called their greed the stumbling block of their iniquity. It can be for us as well. We may not kill or rob others, but if it distracts us from the things of God that are eternal, then it has caused us to stumble as well. If we have placed our hope in wealth as our security, then we have already stumbled. God alone is our unchanging hope and the only real security in an ever changing world. It is not

that money is evil, but the love of it that causes us to stumble into iniquity (1 Timothy 6:10). Keep money in its proper place in your life. Recognize how easily it can vanish. Use it as God intended.

Consider: History has shown that inflation can destroy a lifetime of savings in a very short time. We don’t know what will happen tomorrow. God is our great provider and the only One who we can trust.

## 10/4 Ezekiel 18:23

*23 Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?*

The secular world has put forth the idea that the God of the Old Testament is a mean old man who is looking for someone to clobber. They would have us think that the idea of God evolved into a kinder, more loving God in the New Testament. That is simply an ignorant perspective. He is the same in both the Old and New Testament. He is forever unchanging (Malachi 3:6).

In both testaments God is just and holy. That means He does not tolerate evil. He will judge nations and individuals by how much they know about the truth and what they do with that truth. We see God strike people dead when they know God’s will but intentionally rebel and disobey in both testaments (Acts 5:9; Numbers 3:4). He also invites people to turn from their evil ways and return to Him before He must execute His judgments. If God had any other attitude toward evil, He certainly would not be holy.

We also see that both testaments describe God’s compassion for the poor and weak. His heart goes out to the downtrodden and blesses those who show His compassion to them. In both testaments we see His love for the world and His desire that none should perish. He is an unchanging God and the revelation of Him in the Bible is consistent throughout, in spite of the fact that it was written over a 1400 year period by 40 different authors whose livelihood varied from kings to fishermen.

Remember: God loves mankind and desires that they turn from evil so that they might live. He takes no pleasure in executing His judgments, but He must, for He is just.

## 10/5 Ezekiel 22:30

*30 And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none.*

Just as a city wall could be entered through a breach, making it vulnerable to enemies, so our spiritual walls can have dangerous breaches. When I read the verse for today I wondered why God did not consider Jeremiah and Ezekiel as men standing in that spiritual breach. That was not their role. They were not called to be repairers but instead were proclaimers. They warned of what was coming and told the people why.

What would one who stands in the breach look like? Hezekiah and Josiah were both kings who delayed the coming judgment by turning the people from idolatry to the worship of the one true God. They led the nation to follow the words of the prophets and thereby built up the breach. God proclaimed there was no man to take that role; there was no leader that would turn the people. In all the house of David, there was not one man who would be bold enough to go against the tide of the culture and lead a return to God.

Wherever you live, God is searching for such a leader. You will know them when you hear their vision and see what causes they champion. You will see the effects on the nation. Pray for that leader. Encourage him or her if you have the opportunity, or write a note. It is an extension of grace for your nation. Of course the opposite is true as well. There are actually leaders that increase the breach. They can lead a nation quickly down the road to ruin as the final kings of Judah did.

Consider: Will you stand in the gap in your home, church, and community as God gives you the opportunity?

## 10/6 Ezekiel 28:13

*13 You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared.*

In Ezekiel 28, the prophet is prophesying against the king of Tyre who has said in his heart, “I am a god!” Our verse today shows this is a twofold prophecy that also speaks of Satan. Certainly the king of Tyre was never in Eden, but we know Lucifer was there. The main accusation that is brought against him is that his pride had caused him to desire the very throne of God. The king of Tyre became proud of the abundance of his wealth. Satan became prideful about his wisdom and beauty.

From the day Lucifer was created, he was clothed in precious gemstones. God said he was “the signet of perfection, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty” (verse 12). He is called the guardian cherub, so he must have been given great power. But he corrupted his wisdom for the sake of his splendor. He wanted to be as glorious as God. That is why he had to be cast from heaven and has been at war with God ever since. His battlefield is the souls of men whom he knows God loves.

We can see how this battle must end, for Satan is merely a created being. He will never prevail against his Creator. We can also be warned about the danger of pride corrupting us and turning our blessings into a curse. The greater the gifts, the more temptation we have toward pride. The more successful we are, the more we need to recognize our frailties and humble ourselves before the Lord and our fellow man (James 4:10).

Consider: If pride brought down this mighty one who was full of wisdom, how dangerous is pride in our lives?

## 10/7 Ezekiel 34:23

*23 And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.*

The promises of the return of Israel to their homeland have seen partial fulfillment. The ultimate return will be when Jesus, the son of David, reigns over them. He is the good shepherd of whom Ezekiel wrote. King David lived many generations before Ezekiel. David that reigns over Israel in the Millennium is Jesus, King David’s descendant. After all the kings and leaders that have failed to lead Israel to be a righteous nation, this King of kings will succeed.

That is really a look into the history of the world. As humans, we try to come up with the ideal king or government, but every one falls short. We acknowledge the fact that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Every system of man will continue to fail because man has a sin nature. Even the church that seeks godly leaders will find at times they have made the wrong choice and end up with tyrants. At other times they will have a godly leader thrown out by an ungodly faction. Let’s face it. We need the ultimate ruler whose heart is not corrupted by sin and who has all power to overcome all opposition.

The same is true for the individual. Just as the church and the world need Jesus to reign for there to be righteousness and peace, so every individual needs Jesus to reign in their heart if they are ever to know the same.

Consider: Is Jesus your shepherd king? Will you let Him reign over your life today?

## 10/8 Ezekiel 36:26-27

*26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

This was the promise of God through Ezekiel to the Israelites in captivity. He promised to bring them back and give them a new heart and a new spirit. God would remove their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. He would put his own spirit within them and cause them to live according to God’s commands. We can read about the return and all the continuing problems of hard hearts toward God’s Word. Four hundred years later, Jesus rebuked their descendants for the hardness of their hearts. Finally, on the day of Pentecost, it came to pass.

After the work of the cross and Jesus’ ascension, a way was open for the Holy Spirit to descend on the 120 gathered in the Upper Room. We had to be sanctified vessels before we could receive the Spirit. Only the blood of Christ could accomplish that. From that point in time, the Spirit was no longer upon God’s servants, but within them. Their hard hearts were replaced with hearts that were sensitive to the Spirit and willing to obey. They were born again.

The same thing has happens ever since to those who come to God by faith. The return is not from a nation that has held us captive, but from sin that has enslaved us. Our desires actually change. The power of the Spirit helps us obey what our new spiritually sensitive heart is discerning. We want to obey because His love has been poured out on us. God’s Spirit leads us on to sanctification as we conform, not to the letter, but to the Spirit of the law.

Consider: Have you asked for God to do that work in your heart? If you haven’t, there is no time like now. If you have, thank Him for His wonderful gift! Never take it for granted.

## 10/9 Daniel 1:20

*20 And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.*

Daniel and his three friends had determined to live in accord with their covenant with God. While the king’s other men were enjoying rich foods, bloody steaks, and choice desserts, Daniel and his friends were eating kosher food. It was risky, but when the time of testing came, Daniel and his friends outshined all the others. Could it be that the wisdom from God’s Word, along with His blessing on their obedience, gave them such ability?

When I was in kindergarten I was receiving a failing grade. I could not understand why I had to listen to the teacher when there were so many friends sitting all around me. My mother explained to me that whatever I did I should do for Jesus. I should do my best for Him. Then I had a reason to do my best. My grades from then on did bring God glory along with opportunities to speak about His love.

Christians should be the best in whatever field God has placed them. They should be the best clerks, janitors, generals, politicians, police, business owners or whatever occupation God provides, including ministers or missionaries. We need to show the world what it would look like if Jesus had that job. We should give it our all for Him, just like Daniel and his three friends. Daniel went on to an incredible career as a public servant for several kings. God blessed his life and made him an example for us all.

Consider: How can I do my job to the glory of God?

## 10/10 Daniel 2:32-33

*32 The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.*

The king of Babylon had seen a dream that greatly troubled him. He was familiar with the trickery of his magicians, so instead of asking for the interpretation, he asked for them to tell him what he had dreamed. Only Daniel could do that, for God revealed to Daniel what the king had seen. It was a great image of a man and represented all the governments of man until the kingdom of God would come and take over the whole earth (Daniel 2:44-45).

Patriotism can be a good thing or a horrible thing. Some governments are godly for a time. None stay godly. With power often comes corruption. Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that Daniel’s God was the God of gods and then made a statue of himself and ordered everyone to worship it (Daniel 2:47; 3:5). Even attempts at a theocracy fail, because man is involved. Daniel had said that it is God that sets up kings and takes them down (Daniel 2:21). He is sovereign over it all, even though He gives us the freedom to make choices. A nation may turn to God for a time, but history has shown that they will eventually turn away. To put your faith and trust in the governments of man is to trust in this great image of a man that will eventually be destroyed. The only hope of justice and righteousness in the earth is outside of the power and ability of man. Only when the King of kings reigns will there be peace on earth and liberty and justice for all. He is the only hope for governing mankind. Come Lord Jesus!

Consider: The truth of this dream should remind us where the emphasis of our lives should be placed.

## 10/11 Daniel 3:28

*28 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king’s command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.*

When Daniel’s friends refused to worship the image of the king, the king threw them into a blazing furnace. The king saw a fourth person who protected them from the fire. Nebuchadnezzar referred to him as an angel. The God who Nebuchadnezzar referred to previously as the God of gods, had delivered them.

The description the king gives of these three faithful servants is our focus today. They trusted their God. They would obey God rather than to obey the king even if it meant their life. They said, “Our God is able to deliver us, but if not, we will still not worship the image.” They put their fate into the hand of God, and regardless of how God chose to deal with the situation, they would trust Him. They set aside the king’s command because it ordered them to disobey the supreme authority.

Finally, they yielded up their bodies rather than to worship any other god. Around the world today, there are children of God doing this very thing. They are faced with a choice of putting their life in the hand of God or denying God. From schools to shopping malls to battle fields, people are asked if they will deny Jesus or die. Some are delivered and others receive the ultimate deliverance of graduation into the heavenly realm. Remember them and their families in your prayer time. Prepare your heart for such a moment. Place your complete trust in the God of gods.

Remember: Pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ who are yielding up their bodies rather than to serve or worship any god other than the one true God.

## 10/12 Daniel 4:37

*37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.*

After two experiences that showed Nebuchadnezzar that the God of Israel was the God of gods, he was warned in a dream that God was going to humble him to show him that God sets up whom He chooses as king. It was about year later when the king was surveying his kingdom and thinking how amazing he was that a voice came from heaven telling him the time had come. He lost his mind and wandered about like an animal eating grass.

To really bring the point home, God, through Daniel, told the king that the kingdom would be restored to him after seven years. Just as God foretold, the king’s senses returned to him and amazingly he was restored to his position as king. Who would think it possible that a madman who wandered about like an animal would again become king over the greatest nation on earth at the time? The king now knew how lowly he really was and how great God truly is.

Look at the lengths God went to save this Gentile king! Does He do any less for anyone that has been born? If God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23), will He not go to great lengths to see that everyone knows the choice they are making? And yet, God tells us that there are few that enter the narrow way (Matthew 7:14).

Consider: Everything you have and achieve is because of God’s enabling power. We should never say within ourselves, “Look what I have accomplished,” lest we face a great humbling like this king experienced. Give God all the glory!

## 10/13 Daniel 5:22

*22 And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this,*

The son of King Nebuchadnezzar was Belshazzar. He used the temple’s holy vessels made of gold and silver for drinking at a wild party he threw for his officials. Outside his gates were the armies of the Medes and Persians. He was so sure that his walls were impenetrable that he went on unconcerned.

A hand from heaven appeared on the wall of the hall in which the party was held. It wrote out MENE MENE TEKEL PARSIN. Belshazzar’s knees were knocking as he called for the magicians to interpret the writing. None of them could interpret it. Finally he called Daniel. Don’t you wonder why these kings call Daniel last? Daniel first told him that he had paid no attention to the testimony of his father, Nebuchadnezzar. Though he knew the God of Israel was the God of gods, he brazenly used the temple vessels to praise gods of gold and silver. The message on the wall meant that Belshazzar’s kingdom had come to an end. He was weighed in the balances and found wanting. His kingdom was being given to the Medes and Persians.

That night the forces outside the wall diverted the river that flowed through the city and went under the wall via the river bed. Belshazzar was killed and the city was taken. Belshazzar was held accountable for ignoring the testimony of his father and refusing to humble his heart. We don’t have to have a personal experience to know what is true. Even if we learn it second hand, we are accountable.

Consider: How many testimonies have we heard of lives transformed by the Gospel? How many stories of lives turning from darkness to light have declared that the LORD alone is God? That, too, is God’s way of revealing Himself to us, and we are accountable for heeding that truth.

## 10/14 Daniel 6:16

*16 Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!”*

The king of the next empire Daniel served was Darius. He gave Daniel the position of chief adviser. Darius must have heard of Daniel’s wisdom and service to the Babylonian kings. His testimony preceded him. He was known to be a Hebrew who faithfully served his God. Darius was different from other kings in that he encouraged people to worship their native gods and asked for them to pray to their particular god for his success and wellbeing.

The other political leaders were jealous of Daniel. They couldn’t find anything to accuse him of, so they decided to attack him on religious grounds. Sound familiar? It has been the same throughout history. When God raises up faithful political servants who only desire to do God’s will, they will persecuted by those lusting for power. These politicians conned the king into making a decree that no one could ask anything of any god except the king for thirty days. Any violator would be thrown into a pit of lions. They knew Daniel would never stop praying. It was a daily part of his life.

They caught Daniel praying and had the king enforce the decree. The king realized he had been duped. Our verse today includes the king’s plea for Daniel to be delivered by the God Daniel served. Daniel had a powerful testimony of faithfulness that everyone was aware of. God did deliver him from the lions. His accusers were thrown to the lions. The king decreed that all should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. God can preserve His own and turn the tables on those who plot against us if we will trust Him and remain faithful. Even if we are devoured, we are a testimony of faithfulness and obedience that condemns the ungodly world.

Consider: Daniel’s testimony was known by all because of his faithful consistency, integrity, and use of the gifts God had given him. May we follow his great example!

## 10/15 Daniel 7:13-14

*13 “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*

Jesus most common reference to Himself was “Son of Man”. There are only two uses in the Old Testament. One is the common usage as is found in Ezekiel. God often called Ezekiel, “son of man” (Ezekiel 2:3). It was a reference of humility (Isaiah 51:12). God is eternally existent, but we are sons and daughters of man. The other use is here in Daniel. Daniel had a vision of one “like a son of man” that came before God, the Ancient of Days.

In this vision, God gave the One who was like a son of man everlasting dominion, glory, a kingdom, and the service of all people. The reason that the Jewish leaders were so upset with Jesus telling them they would see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven was because they knew this verse (Matthew 26:64). Jesus was saying that He is this one who is like a son of man. He is human, but He is also divine. He is the Messiah and all nations will serve Him. Those leaders could destroy His body (for a short time), but they could never destroy His kingdom. He is the King of kings. Now they knew which usage of “son of man” that Jesus had regularly been referencing.

When Jesus said, “All authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me,” he had already experienced the Daniel passage. (Matthew 28:18). He has not enforced that authority yet, but the time is soon to come when He will. He is still building His kingdom one living stone at a time.

Consider: We saw in the book of Daniel that God sets up and takes down kings. One day God will set up the eternally perfect King. He is the only One we would want to reign over us forever, for His banner over us is love (Song of Songs 2:4).

## 10/16 Daniel 10:13

*13 The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia,*

Daniel fasted for three weeks from all but the very necessities of life while he mourned over a word from God. As he stood beside the Tigris River, an angel appeared before him. No one else could see the angel, but they sensed his powerful presence and ran away. Daniel was overwhelmed and fell on his face. He had to be strengthened by the angel so that he could stand and receive the message from God.

The angel explained that he had been dispatched the moment Daniel began his fast, but another spiritual being, the Prince of Persia, resisted him for three weeks. The archangel Michael came to assist so that he could finally get through to Daniel. His message was about the future of Israel that would take place in the later days. After he relayed the message, he would go back to fight the Prince of Persia and then the Prince of Greece would come.

This is one of the few Biblical accounts of the spiritual forces that are fighting in the heavenlies. The fallen angels resist God’s angels. This particular angel referred to the beings as princes of nations. There appears to be powerful demonic beings who push nations to conquer and destroy. No wonder the history of the world is a history of war.

We can also learn from this passage that there are times when we must persevere in prayer. The answer is on its way, but there are powers that resist it. God has allowed all these who oppose Him for His own purposes. When the eternal kingdom is established, we will know that there is no power, human, or angel, who can resist God. We will be amazed to understand how God worked in spite of all opposition for our good and His glory.

Remember: Regardless of the powers that rage around us, both physical and spiritual, God is on the throne of heaven. He is all-powerful and all-knowing.

## 10/17 Daniel 12:4

*4 But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.”*

An angel had given Daniel a vision of the future of Israel and the scenario of the last days. Daniel didn’t understand this vision, and the angel said the words were to be shut up and the book sealed until the time of the end. Many who are curious about the end times have tried to understand Daniel and Revelation. The angel said the book was shut up until that time. We can certainly guess, but only the wise will understand when the time arrives.

What we do know is explained in the verses around our passage. There will be a time of great trouble for the Jews (Daniel 12:1). Other prophecies refer to this as “Jacob’s Trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7). God will bring a great deliverance for those whose names are written in the book. Our verse for today tells us that people would be running to and fro. Never before in history of the world has man traveled to the extent that he travels today. Our skies are filled with ever larger jets transporting greater numbers of people from one side of the planet to the other. Knowledge is increasing at an exponential rate. Schools can’t keep their textbooks up to date with the constant increase of knowledge. In my brief lifetime, computers and cell phones have become common household items. Changing a heart valve or doing a bypass is routine. Hips and knees are replaced with titanium. Hearts are kept in rhythm with tiny devises implanted in the body. We’ve mapped our own genome and sent a great telescope into orbit which photographs galaxies deep in space.

Is it time for the book of Daniel to be opened? We should keep our eyes on Israel. The threat of their annihilation grows daily as the turmoil in the Middle East increases. We should be living as if every day was our last. Love wholeheartedly. Obey the leading of the Holy Spirit. Pray without ceasing. Live in expectation of the Master’s return (Luke 12:25-48).

Consider: What would you change about your life if you knew Jesus was returning for you today? Why wouldn’t you live that way every day?

## 10/18 Hosea 3:3

*3 And I said to her, “You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.”*

During the decline and fall of Israel, God told Hosea to take a wife of whoredom. She bore him three children and then left to look for other lovers. Each one was successively poorer than the previous one. Hosea went and searched for her. He gave her lover the money to buy things she needed (Hosea 2:5, 8). She gave her lover the credit for those things, not knowing it was Hosea who had provided it. Her lover probably thought Hosea was a fool. Indeed, love does things that appear foolish. Imagine the pain in Hosea’s heart as he caught a glimpse of her embracing her lover in gratitude for the gifts. Can you see God’s heart weeping over us as we run after other loves and receive His gifts but then credit them to the world or our own abilities (James 4:4)?

Finally she was reduced to utter poverty and stood for sale on the slave block. Hosea bought her back. Now she must stay with him and do his bidding, but God had commanded Hosea to love her even as he was loved by God. Though she was bound by law to be faithful, Hosea declared, “So will I also be to you.”

When we are reduced to shame by our sinful nature, God comes and redeems us. We would be blessed just to be a slave in His service. We are obligated to do whatever He asks in utter faithfulness, for we are purchased by His blood. The amazing thing that we find difficult to grasp is that He declares, “So will I also be to you.”

Consider: This is the greatest love story ever told. It’s about Jesus and you.

## 10/19 Hosea 6:3

*3 Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.”*

Hosea had understood God’s passion to be in relationship with His people. These are Hosea’s words, pleading with Israel to return to the LORD. The word “know” is used as an intellectual awareness, but also in regards to the intimacy of husband and wife (Genesis 4:1). Hosea had just illustrated by his purchase of his wayward wife God’s pursuit of us in spite of our being unfaithful. He is crying out for Israel to follow the picture his prophetic life has set before them. Let God take you back. Turn around and run to Him.

As sure as the sun comes up in the morning, you can be sure God is pursuing you. The original language tells us that He will come like the latter and early rains. Israel had two seasons of rain that they depended on for their crops. They could count on each season of rain and desperately needed each. Hosea is saying we desperately need the LORD, and He will come to us in our time of need and refresh us with His life giving Spirit.

The LORD responded to Hosea’s plea by saying that Israel’s love for Him is like the morning fog that soon disappears. If you are reading this devotional, you probably have an intellectual knowledge of God. Hosea is telling us to press on to a relationship with God. You will see Him faithfully coming to greet you. He will refresh your soul and give you the water of life.

Consider: Are you pressing on to know the LORD or have you become satisfied with your current condition?

## 10/20 Joel 2:28

*28 “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.*

The Apostle Peter said that this prophecy came to pass on Pentecost after Jesus’ ascension. He preached in the power of the Spirit to the crowd that had gathered and thousands were saved (Acts 2:17, 41). When the prophet Joel gave this prophecy, he had been encouraging the nations of Israel and Judah to turn to God after a devastating locust plague had devoured all their crops. Tragedy is sometimes necessary to get our attention. It seems we go on day after day thinking nothing will change and that God will put up with our mediocre worship.

The plague did its intended job of turning the hearts of the people back to the LORD. The LORD soon restored what they had lost and blessed the nations. Then He gave them a glimpse of an even greater future when the Spirit of God would be poured out into the hearts of those who sought Him. That is the greatest blessing that we could receive. It is that blessing that helps to keep us from turning away from God in the first place. It is the presence of the Spirit of God in our spirit who will commune with us if we will be still and wait on Him.

If you have received Christ, then you have received this blessing. Now you must nurture that relationship to know the fullness of it. Ask that your ear be opened, and learn to wait on Him (Psalm 40:6). Learn to be still and know that He is God (Psalm 46:10). Be sure that what you are hearing is in line with God’s Word and His nature. Then, act in faith.

Consider what a great blessing it is to live in this age when the Spirit of God indwells His people. Let us not take it for granted or become complacent but press on to know the LORD and His will for us today.

## 10/21 Amos 8:11

*11 “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I will send a famine on the land -not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.”*

As Amos prophesied about the destruction of Israel, God told the people that He had sent prophets who delivered God’s Word, but they refused to hear them (Amos 2:11-12). The people longed for the Day of the LORD, but it would be darkness for them and not light (Amos 5:18-20). While thinking that God was still with them and going to exalt them, they worshiped foreign gods and cheated the poor. They had phrases from their past history with God’s Word, but now used those phrases out of context, forgetting the true message of those words.

History is repeating itself. While many today long for the LORD’s return, they forget that He is coming to judge the earth. They think they will be exalted in that day, but it will be a day of darkness and not light. They can quote little phrases from the Bible, but they don’t know the context or message of the passage. The prophets have proclaimed the Word, but we, like Israel, have told them to be silent.

There is a famine for hearing the words of the LORD, not because so few are still faithfully proclaiming them, but because the people seek out teachers who will tickle their ears (2 Timothy 4:3). You are probably using this devotional because you want to know what the Bible teaches, not a nice little pat on the back to send you out for the day. If you have not done so already, find a church where the Scriptures are taught, where the teachers go through one book of the Bible at a time, leaving nothing out. Hear the whole counsel of God. Let the words change your thinking and way of life.

Consider: If you asked 100 people on the street about the most famous passage in the New Testament, John 3:16, how many do you think would be able to tell you the context of that chapter?

## 10/22 Obadiah 1:15

*15 For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head.*

Though there is a final Day of the LORD in which He will judge the nations. Nations have experienced the judgments of God throughout history. What they have sown, they have also reaped. It is true for individuals as well. Paul the Apostle wrote that those who sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption (Galatians 6:8). Jesus said that those who take the sword shall die by the sword (Matthew 26:52), and the merciful shall receive mercy (Matthew 5:7).

Obadiah was prophesying to the nation of Edom. They had taken part in the plunder of Judah, though they were distant cousins of the Israelites. They were warned that as they had done, it would be done to them. If we really believed that what we do to others would be done to us, how would our actions change? How would a nation change? If we really believed our deeds would return on our own head, what kind of deeds would we do today? Would we not be looking for opportunities to aid the needy and encourage and help others? Would we not be careful to do no harm both verbally and physically to anyone?

Obadiah’s message was a warning that judgment was certain. Their pride had made them arrogant (Obadiah 1:3). Hopefully there is still time for us to repent and plead for mercy when we think of how we have spoken and treated others. Kindness and gentleness are fruits of the Spirit of God living in His children (Galatians 5:22-23). In like manner, we should want others to speak truth to us when we are straying.

Consider: Before you act or speak today, think to yourself, “Is this how I want others to be toward me?” This is another way to express the Golden Rule.

## 10/23 Jonah 1:17

*17 And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

Jonah was called by God to go to the brutal Ninevites and command them to repent or be destroyed. He decided it was better to run from God than to obey Him. It wasn’t because he was afraid of them, but rather that he thought they might repent and receive the grace of God (Jonah 4:2). So, he boarded a ship to another destination. While he knew about God’s grace and mercy, he didn’t understand God’s presence is everywhere.

A storm came up and threatened to sink the ship. Jonah knew the storm was about him and that he was endangering the crew’s lives, so he had them throw him overboard. It appears he wasn’t entirely dispassionate about the souls of men. In fact, when the storm ceased, those sailors were the first converts after his call to Nineveh (Jonah 1:16).

God had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. Critics of the Bible point to this as a sign that the Bible is just fairy tales. However, the historical book of Kings (2 Kings 14:25) mentions Jonah as a real person, and Jesus also referred to this as an historical fact (Matthew 12:39-41). If you don’t believe the earth was created by God or that He could prepare a fish capable of swallowing Jonah and keeping him alive three days in that fish, then you would have to agree with the skeptics. But if God is the Creator, then of course He could create a fish that would serve this purpose. The book of Jonah appears to be an autobiographical account of a prophet whose heart was changed by the same God who had grace and mercy upon the repentant Ninevites. There would be no reason for an Israelite to create a fictional story in which the hero was as bad as the enemy of their nation, nor would they want to see their enemy as recipients of God’s mercy. Jonah is an amazing but true story about our stubborn hearts, God’s love for mankind, and His faithfulness to teach His children.

Consider: You can run from God, but you can’t hide from Him.

## 10/24 Micah 4:3

*3 He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore;*

In Daniel chapter two we saw that the future governments of the world were represented by an image of a man. They will all ultimately fail. When one rises to power and becomes strong, the people become increasingly lethargic and sensual and then another nation takes its place. The cycle happens again and again until the son of David, Christ Jesus, restores the throne of David in perfect righteousness.

A large part of the world’s economies are spent on defense. Imagine the prosperity the world would experience if all those finances were spent on productive endeavors. That is what will happen under the reign of Jesus on the earth. When there is a dispute among the nations, He will judge it righteously and all will submit to His judgment. They will submit because He is completely just and all-knowing and all-powerful.

Redeemed children of God experience that to some extent now as they forgive offenses against them and seek the welfare of others. Allowing Jesus to reign in your life is to experience being in His kingdom. We seek peace with our neighbors and those who have something against us. Jesus said that it is the peacemakers who will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9).

Consider: So far as it depends on us, we should be at peace with all people, for the Prince of Peace reigns over our hearts (Romans 12:18).

## 10/25 Micah 7:7-8

*7 But as for me, I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. 8 Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me*.

What do we do when everything seems to be against us, when it seems our enemies have the upper hand and are doing a victory dance? Israel was on the verge of defeat because of their sins. Micah’s world was turned upside down. Though he had done nothing wrong, he was suffering the same judgment as the people responsible for the calamity. It is hard for most of us imagine the demise of our nation and being carried away to another land.

His godly response is the same one that we should have when all seems hopeless. Look to the LORD. Wait for the God of our salvation. Know that He will hear you. It is easier said than done. It takes faith and a forward vision. It is not a hope that the current situation will change, but that God will be with us through it and direct us to the other side.

Look. Wait. Know. We look to the LORD for His comfort and to remind ourselves that it is all in His hands. Nothing gets by Him. Wait for Him to show you His salvation. He has the right response if we will heed His words and listen for His still small voice. Wait until you get His direction. Until then keep doing what you know you should, trusting that God is always faithful. Finally, know that God has heard your prayer. Even when you fall, you can know that you will rise. When you sit in darkness, let Him be your light.

Remember: Look to the LORD. Wait for the God of your salvation. Know that He hears your prayer. Let him be your light when you sit in the darkness of this fallen world.

## 10/26 Micah 7:18-19

*18 Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. 19 He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.*

Micah knew the nature of God. His gloomy message of impending judgment was mixed with a message of future hope. It was expectant hope based on the character of God. God takes no delight in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23). He made a way to pardon their iniquity. It would come hundreds of years later on the cross, but God is not bound by time. If in their exile they would just repent and give their hearts to Him, He would pass over their transgressions, pardon their sins, and cast those sins into the depths of the sea.

He was sending calamity to turn their hearts back to Him, which would save them from their own destruction. That was an expression of His steadfast love. Paul wrote in the New Testament that the more he loved, the less He was loved (2 Corinthians 12:15). His loving actions for the church upset those who wanted to have their own way for their own advancement. His loving discipline was not always well received. Many Israelites were probably angry with God because of His discipline. If we could only see that it is out of the steadfast love in which He delights that He exercises that discipline. He is more concerned about our eternal good than our temporal happiness.

For those who have received the gift of salvation through the cross of Jesus, the fact that all our sins are cast into the depths of the sea is joy unspeakable. No deep sea sub will ever be able to bring them back to the surface. Jesus has had compassion on us and has tread our iniquities underfoot. Condemnation is gone forever, and the steadfast love of the LORD is our daily delight (Romans 8:1).

Consider: Since it was God’s delight in His steadfast love to remove your sins from you, should you bring them up again?

## 10/27 Nahum 3:7

*7 And all who look at you will shrink from you and say, Wasted is Nineveh; who will grieve for her? Where shall I seek comforters for you?*

Nahum prophesied of the destruction of Nineveh. Just one hundred years earlier, Jonah had led this enormous city to repentance. Since that time it had risen in power and conquered the northern ten tribes of Israel and came very close to conquering the south as well.

Now Nahum is telling of certain destruction to the grandchildren of those to whom Jonah preached. They had returned to their ruthless ways and inhumane treatment of their enemies. However, this time they do not repent. Nahum told them all their weaponry and their great warriors would not be able to save them. He asked if they thought they were somehow different from the great cities that had fallen in the past.

How urgent it is that we pass on our faith to our children and grandchildren. A relationship with God tends toward prosperity, but it is in prosperity that we begin to think we don’t need God. The greatness of a nation only makes it a target for others. Only divine favor can keep a nation protected, and divine favor comes from the blessing we receive when we are in relationship with God and obeying Him. As the psalmist wrote, “Unless the LORD keeps the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Psalm 127:1)

Consider: Are you doing everything possible to pass on your faith to your children and grandchildren?

## 10/28 Habakkuk 2:4

*4 “Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.*

Habakkuk prophesied to Judah just before its fall to the Chaldeans. His short book records his complaint to the LORD and the LORD’S answer. At first he complained about the corruption of his own people. The LORD’S answer was that judgment was on its way by the hand of the Chaldeans. Then he complained about the Chaldeans. They seemed to be brutally swallowing up all the nations and robbing them of their goods. Our verse today is part of the LORD’S answer.

Those God uses for judgment are not used because they are more righteous than the nations they conquer. The LORD will predict the future demise of the Chaldeans. They were prideful, power worshiping idolaters. They were a people of twisted souls. Then the LORD declared that the righteous shall live by faith. This verse was quoted three times in the New Testament (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38).

We can complain all we want about the world around us, our own nation, and the wicked nations of the earth, but that is the way fallen people behave. The righteous, on the other hand, shall live by his faith. We are to live consistent lives according to the faith God has given us. It is by faith that we have a life that is different. Living by our faith is the best way to affect the world around us. Sitting in a corner and complaining about injustice and evil doesn’t help change anything. Living by your faith will touch lives.

Consider: The next time you are tempted to join others in a complaining session, remember that you will be more helpful by simply living by your faith. The New Testament refers to this verse to teach that it is by faith that we lay hold of eternal life.

## 10/29 Habakkuk 2:20

*20 But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”*

In the midst of rebuking the people for their sin of idolatry, Habakkuk reminded them that the LORD is in his holy temple. In the temple in Jerusalem over the Ark of the Covenant was the manifest presence of the LORD. It was not an image of metal, stone, or wood. It was a ball of light that was referred to as the Shekinah. Though God’s presence is everywhere at all times, this manifestation of His presence reminded the people of Israel that they were God’s people, chosen to serve a holy God.

Habakkuk’s words should have reminded the people of the vanity of idols and the power of God to watch over the soon coming captivity and return. Those words should remind us today that God is on the throne of heaven. All things are in His hands. The meaningless things we turn to, programs, formulas, and methods are nothing if they are not His instructions for the situation we face.

We should sit in silence before God and hear what He has to say. We have nothing to tell Him that He does not already know. Though He invites us to share our heart and request our needs be met, He is the only One that really has something to say. We can do this in two different but equally important ways. We can sit before our open Bible and let the words of Scripture speak to our hearts. We can also sit silently in prayer listening for His still small voice as He applies the Word to our hearts. Both are needed. It takes discipline, especially in our fast paced world. Our time could not be spent in a more important way. Keep silence before Him.

Consider: Think about how to order your day so that you take time for this most important discipline. Will you commit to do this daily?

## 10/30 Zephaniah 3:5

*5 The LORD within her is righteous; he does no injustice; every morning he shows forth his justice; each dawn he does not fail; but the unjust knows no shame.*

The LORD listed the sins of the city of Jerusalem. They would not listen, accept correction, or draw near to God. Her officials were described as lions, her judges as wolves, and her prophets as fickle, treacherous men. Her priests profaned what was holy and did violence to the Scriptures. Does any of that sound familiar?

Yet, the LORD within her is righteous. Many will blame all that we see on the LORD, when much of the sorrow is the result of the acts of evil men. Their actions do not reflect on God. He is never unjust. Every morning He shows forth His justice. Look at the consequences of man’s sin and you will see a bit of His justice. What a person sows, he or she will also reap. Each dawn God does not fail. He is always there for us. He is keeping a record. The wicked may seem like they are getting away with murder, but God has their day of reckoning already set.

The unjust knows no shame. They do not receive the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They boast about what they think they get away with, but those words will condemn them on Judgement Day. God warned them that a little correction would not turn them back to God. Judgement had to be severe. The prophecy then jumps to the final confrontation between good and evil, the Battle of Armageddon. In that day, the heart of the wicked will be just as hardened toward God.

Consider: Once again we see the first indictments as the refusal to: listen, accept correction, or draw near to God. Let us never be guilty of neglecting these, for they are the beginning of backsliding into all manner of evil, both for individuals and for nations.

## 10/31 Haggai 2:9

*9 The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts.’”*

This is one of the many prophetic utterances that have an intermediate and an ultimate fulfillment. The Jews had just begun to return from captivity. They were convicted by Haggai’s prophecies to stop working on their own houses and finish the house of the LORD. They had laid the foundation but were disappointed as it seemed like nothing compared to what Solomon had built (Ezra 3:12). That is when God encouraged them with our verse for today. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former.

Centuries later, Herod the Great would embark on a remodeling project that would bring these words to pass. During those centuries they had to hang on to that promise by faith, believing what they did not yet see. But this was only the intermediate fulfillment. The house of the LORD, His dwelling place, is the body of Christ. That includes all those who have received Him by faith. When God finishes the work He started in us, the glory of the house of the LORD will far surpass anything man has made (Philippians 1:6).

There will be the true place of peace, for we are indwelt by the Prince of Peace. The former temple was looted and defiled by Antiochus and then finally destroyed by General Titus. It was a place of peace only in the sense that through the sacrifices people looked forward to Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). True and lasting peace is the presence of our Redeemer living in our hearts.

Consider: Do you know that peace? Do you let Him bring peace to all the various events of your life by His presence in you? We look by faith into the future when His work in us will be completed.

November

## 11/1 Zechariah 3:2

*2 And the LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?”*

Zechariah prophesied during the restoration and rebuilding of the Temple. His book is filled with visions and prophecies. In the vision we are studying today, Zechariah saw the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord. At the angel’s right was Satan who was ready to fling accusations about Joshua. “Satan” means “accuser.” We see a similar scene at the beginning of the book of Job (Job 1:9).

When Lucifer, which is another name for Satan, fell from his lofty state because of pride, one of his main occupations became accusing those whom God loves. It is his way of trying to punish God. He still has access to the heavenly realm and brings accusations against us all. There is certainly plenty for which he can accuse us. The angel of the LORD, who is referred to as the LORD, and whom I understand to be Jesus, said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, O Satan!” In the New Testament book of Jude, we read that we should not try to deal with Satan on our own but rather follow the example set here in Zechariah (and apparently by the archangel Michael also) by asking the LORD to rebuke Satan (Jude 1:9).

Then the angel of the LORD told Satan that Joshua is a brand plucked from the fire. The famous evangelist John Wesley’s mother rescued him from a house fire when he was just a small child. She sometimes referred to John as “a brand plucked from the fire.” All those in Christ Jesus are all brands plucked from a fire. We were destined for judgment. Satan had plenty of material with which to impugn us. But we were snatched from the fire and given the righteous robe of Jesus and a mission to serve the LORD. Like the servants of God that came out of the fiery furnace of Babylon (Daniel 3), the LORD has rescued us that we might be His instruments to rescue others.

Consider: Satan is always ready to sling accusations about you, but you have a defense attorney, Christ Jesus (1 John 2:1). He plucked you from the fire and gave you His righteousness. How should we then live?

## 11/2 Zechariah 9:9

*9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Some have said that the Maccabean leaders fulfilled this prophecy, but there is one problem. The prophecy goes on to say that his rule shall be from the River to the ends of the earth (Zechariah 9:10). Matthew cites the verse in Matthew 21:5 to say it was fulfilled in Jesus. His rule will be from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth. Even now that rule has covered the earth in the hearts of those who are His. One day it will be over all the inhabitants of the earth.

Concerning the above phrase, “righteous and having salvation.” There is righteousness compared to others, and there is the ultimate righteousness, the LORD! There is salvation from our present evil foes, and there is salvation from our sinful nature and the immortal foe who is continually accusing us.

This king is humble. Humility is emphasized by the true greatness of the individual. If one knows very little and has never accomplished anything, humility is simply an acknowledgement of his or her condition. In One who is the Creator of all things and has infinite wisdom, and yet yields His will to the Father, we see the ultimate expression of humility. Matthew was right. This verse was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.

Consider: In Jesus, we are righteous and have salvation. The source of our humility is knowing that our righteousness and salvation is from Him alone.

## 11/3 Zechariah 12:10

*10 “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.*

Zechariah prophesied about a future day when the nations of the earth gather to attack Jerusalem. God promises to confuse the attackers and empower the inhabitants of Jerusalem so that they will win a great victory over their enemies. The house of David will be especially empowered during that battle. The outcome of the battle is quite unusual.

God “will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy.” It is not clear if it is during the duress of the battle or after their victory. It is by grace that we are saved (Ephesians 2:8). Even our pleas for the mercy of God are a gift from God. Perhaps while in the face of immanent death the Jewish people will cry out to Jesus as their Messiah. Then, after the answer from God who turns the tide of battle, they realize that their ancestors had rejected the true Messiah.

They will mourn greatly as they look on the One they pierced. Does this Scripture refer to a vision, or the return of the LORD? John the Beloved cites this verse and tells us that this One is Jesus (John 19:37). Why do the people weep so bitterly? Think of all the generations that missed the blessing of knowing His saving grace. Think of the years wasted in study that fell so short of the fullness of Christ. Think of the love of God that they rejected for so long.

Consider: Those are our tears too, for when we come to Christ we weep bitterly for rejecting such a great love for so long. Let us live fully in that relationship that we have been given by the spirit of grace that led us to pleas for mercy.

## 11/4 Malachi 1:13

*13 But you say, ‘What a weariness this is,’ and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD.*

After the return from captivity and the rebuilding of the temple, the people expected the Messiah to come and make their nation great. As time went on and the promises lingered, the people began to become apathetic. Where were the answers to all the promises of greatness? The priests began to be corrupt. Worship became a routine, divorce was rampant, and the justice system was failing to protect the innocent. The people would bring sacrifices that were culled from their herds as unfit or killed by wild animals. It was as if they were giving God the leftovers instead of their best offering.

They began to complain about worshiping God as if it was distracting them from more important things. The fear of God and the loving response to His steadfast love was missing. “If God won’t bless us and bring the Messiah, why should we sacrifice for Him?” they might have asked. Today we might hear, “Do we have to go to church this Sunday? Why don’t we spend our offering on going to the lake instead?”

If we are looking to God simply for what He can give us, we have forgotten the Great Commandment, to love God with our all. We slip away from Him, and He withholds His blessings to turn us back to what is important. Then we complain that it is of no value to serve God because He isn’t blessing us, and so the cycle goes. God is worthy because of who He is. All that we are and all that we have, every breath we take is His gift to us. He deserves the best of our time, talent, and finances. Regardless of your present circumstances, His steadfast love for you never fails (Lamentations 3:22). What about your love for Him?

Consider: Have you observed how people and nations follow the pattern we see in the history of Israel? What can you do about it? What will you do about it?

## 11/5 Malachi 3:1

*1 “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts*.

The people of the restored nation were asking, “Where is the God of justice” (Malachi 2:17). They saw the backslidden condition of their nation and yet wondered why the Messiah didn’t come and set things right. The same cry was going up in Jesus’ day. The corrupt priesthood and the oppression of the Romans had people praying for the coming of the Messiah. You may have heard or even uttered a similar cry. When will the LORD return to end all injustice and suffering?

God answered that cry with a stern warning. The first sentence is quoted in three of the Gospels (Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27). They tell us that it refers to John the Baptist. “Me” is the Lord, for whom the way is prepared. The rest of the passage in Malachi tells us that His coming was not quite what they expected. He was coming to refine them all like metal is refined in a furnace. He was going to be a witness against sorcerers, adulterers, liars, abuse of workers by employers, those who oppress the widow and fatherless, those who would not help travelers, as well as those who do not fear Him (Malachi 3:5).

The messenger of the covenant is Jesus, who is not the same as the messenger who prepares the way. Jesus did come unexpectedly to the Temple and cleaned it out (John 2:15-17). He made a new covenant between God and man with His own blood. He did expose the hypocrisy of the religious and the sin of many. Like most prophecies, the ultimate fulfillment will be when He comes the second time in judgment. And who can stand when He appears (Malachi 3:2)!

Consider: The refinement comes through the trials of life. For those who are in Christ, those fiery trials burn off the dross and help prepare us for heaven.

## 11/6 Matthew 2:13

*3 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said,“Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”*

We will be looking at the life of Christ four times, once in each of the Gospels. Matthew presents Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. He links numerous Old Testament passages with events in Jesus’ life to show that sending Jesus to save us was God’s plan from the beginning. In *Divine Messiah* I showed that in nearly every chapter of Matthew Jesus is seen as doing something the Scriptures ascribe to the eternal God of Israel. It is one thing for Jesus to be a great teacher, but another thing altogether to say that He is God, one with the Father from all eternity.

From His birth we see the ancient conflict between good and evil, as Herod was inspired to try to kill Jesus as a baby. It reminds us of the earlier killing of the baby boys in Egypt (Exodus 1:16). Both were an attempt by Satan to stop the fulfillment of the promise in Genesis 3:15. A male descendant of Eve would crush the head of the serpent, Satan.

God is all-knowing. He is outside of time. There is nothing His foes can do that He has not already seen and countered. Joseph was warned to take the child and His mother to Egypt. Notice the angel did not say “your wife” as they had not yet consummated their marriage. The gifts from the wise men to the Christ child would fund the journey and their stay in Egypt.

Consider: Nothing ever catches God by surprise. It is impossible to fight against the One who created all things and knows all. Are you on the winning side of this eternal conflict?

## 11/7 Matthew 3:8-9

*8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.*

These are the words of John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus, whom God sent to prepare the way for Jesus. It had been centuries since the Jews had seen a real prophet of God. His message was simple. They should all repent of their ways and prepare for the coming of the Messiah. Jews flocked into the wilderness to be baptized by John.

When the religious leaders came to see John, they were shocked to hear him call them a family of baby snakes. He told them that they needed to demonstrate with their lives that they had indeed repented. That is true for all of us. It is one thing to tell God we are sorry for our ways, but another thing to actually change our ways. Just because we are involved in religious activities and are respected as being religious holds no weight with God.

Some rabbis taught that all children of Abraham were destined to be in heaven. Jesus and John the Baptist both made it very clear that this was not the case. Each person has to truly repent, which would result in a changed life. The meaning of “a child of Abraham” is one who lives by the example of faith that Abraham set.

Consider: You may think you are too bad to come to Jesus and be His disciple. The real problem lies with those who think they are too good. If God can raise up a stone to be a child of God, He will have no problem doing the same with you. All He asks is that you repent and let Him change your life. Is your heart as hard as a stone? Perhaps that is what John was referring to.

## 11/8 Matthew 3:15

*15 But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.*

Jesus began His ministry by going to John the Baptist to be baptized. When John heard Jesus’ request, John said it was Jesus that should baptize him. Our verse today is Jesus’ response. There was nothing for which Jesus needed to repent. Nevertheless, Jesus was obeying the leading of the Holy Spirit and leaving an example for us to follow (John 13:15). There are times when we will be led to do things simply as an example. If we expect others to do them, we should lead the way by living out what we are teaching.

The baptism of John was one of repentance of sin and preparing the heart to receive Jesus. Baptism after the death and resurrection of Jesus took on a new meaning. It is a picture of our associating ourselves with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection. We go under the water to declare we have died to our old nature, and we rise to say we now live in the resurrected power of Christ.

As new creations in Christ Jesus, we are to do what Jesus did here in obeying the Holy Spirit wherever He may lead us. It may be to do things that seem unnecessary, but whatever He leads us to do will bear fruit. It is not important that we understand, but rather that we simply obey in faith. The results are His work.

Consider: One popular hymn by John H. Sammis declares, “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way, to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.” Let us follow Jesus’ example in all things.

## 11/9 Matthew 4:1

*1Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*

Immediately after Jesus inaugurated His ministry by being baptized by John, the Spirit of God led Him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. I think it necessary to repeat what we see in the fine print at the bottom of the screen during car commercials as the car goes racing around. “Professional driver – closed course. Do not attempt.” However, God does allow trials and temptations to strengthen us. The greenhouse plant that is suddenly moved into the harsh sun will wither and often die. The tree that grows up in the strong winds grows roots that can withstand the storms it regularly endures.

Jesus was establishing the fact that He was not going to rely on His own reasoning or take any short cuts to His goal. He would rely completely on the Word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit. We must establish the same reliance on the Father if we are to be useful to the kingdom of God. Our temptations will be in proportion to our strength (1 Corinthians 10:13). If we look to the LORD during each one, He will provide a way to escape.

The trials and temptations of life are necessary to help us grow in dependence on the LORD and faith in His Word. Don’t look on them as burdens, but as tools to teach us. When we are victorious, we can take the lessons we learn to help others who are enduring similar trials or temptations. Whether you are enduring a physical affliction or a spiritual temptation, ask God how He can use it to make you stronger in Him. Then look for opportunities to encourage others that are going through a similar difficulty.

Consider: Keep a journal of the things God teaches you and illustrations that help you depend on God and overcome. It will be handy when you have opportunities to encourage others who are struggling with the same problems.

## 11/10 Matthew 4:17

*17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

After Jesus’ baptism and temptation, He returned to His home in Nazareth. His message was rejected and His life threatened (Luke 4:29), so He moved to Capernaum. There He stayed in the home of one of His disciples, Peter. The remains of the house have been identified. It was only a block from the synagogue and a couple of blocks from the lake the Bible calls the Sea of Galilee. The main road from Rome to Egypt, the Way of the Sea, passed by their door (Isaiah 9:1-2).

Then Jesus began by preaching the same message that John was preaching (Matthew 3:2). To repent means to have a radical reversal in one’s thinking and behavior. It means to turn around and go the opposite direction. The Jews were focused on daily necessities and hoped to rid themselves of Roman rule. Religious and political leaders were corrupt. Fighting among the various religious sects was part of daily life. The deliverer they hoped for was a military hero whose victory would usher in prosperity. That kind of thinking had to be turned around to prepare them for the arrival of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom was not a physical one that ruled over other nations, but the rule of God in the hearts of men of every nation. Jesus was rejected in His hometown because He declared the message would go to the nations (Luke 4:24-28). A few did repent and shift their thinking and expectations. By receiving Jesus, they entered the kingdom. It is just as necessary today for us to repent and let our thoughts and goals be directed by the Holy Spirit if we would enter the kingdom of God.

Consider: Will you allow a radical reversal in your thinking and behavior and go in a new direction? Will you let go of the hope of an earthly hero and serve the greatest hero, Christ Jesus?

## 11/11 Matthew 4:23

*23 And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.*

This is exactly the region to which Isaiah predicted the Messiah would bring light (Isaiah 9:1-2). It was called “Galilee of the Gentiles” because of numerous large Gentile cities. There were also a large number of Jewish cities in this agricultural region, many more than there are today. The ruins of some of these synagogues where Jesus taught have been discovered by archeologists.

One might wonder why God would send His Son to this particular region. Most of the disciples came from this area. In spite of the critical attitude Judea held against this area, it was quite a studious region. The Galileans had a stronger expectation and hope of the coming Messiah. They also had more interaction with the rest of the world, as it lay on the crossroads of major trade routes.

The “gospel” means “good news.” Jesus was sharing the good news that God desires to forgive us of our sin and be the Lord of our life. His healing ministry showed His power over the curse of sin and death. If He could deal with the effects of this fallen world, then we should have the hope that He can deal with our other problem, the effect of the sin nature we inherited from Adam. His ability to powerfully heal every disease gave the people hope that He could heal our spiritual disease of sin as well.

Consider: When we follow hard after the Lord, we are sometimes discouraged by our shortcomings. Know that the Lord has the power to see you through to your homecoming. He will finish the work He started in you (Philippians 1:6).

## 11/12 Matthew 5:17

*17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*

Some people perceived Jesus to be discarding the laws of Moses because of the way He interpreted them. Jesus healed on the Sabbath, did not sanction divorce, and discouraged the idea of a new Jewish king. These and other issues conflicted with the accepted application of what Moses had written. And yet, Jesus gave Scripture as a reason for His differing interpretation.

Jesus said He had come to “fulfill” the Law and the Prophets. The word in its original language means “to fill up” or “complete,” as in filling a net to the full or filling a hole in a road to make the road level. He was adding what was lacking to Scripture to make it complete. That was quite a claim!

He fulfilled it by becoming the sacrifice that God accepted for our sins. He lived the righteous requirements of the Law in our place. He is the fulfillment of the prophecies of the coming Messiah. He is all that Scripture points to in its types and shadows. (See the book *Jesus Concealed in the Old Testament.*) The letters in the New Testament are inspired commentary on what Jesus taught and the application of that teaching. There is no prophet since that can add to what Jesus made complete. The Old Testament is Jesus concealed while the New is Jesus revealed. It’s all about Jesus.

Consider: While other books may give us insights into understanding the culture and language of the New Testament, most of our study should be in the Scriptures. Balance your study of the older covenant with that of Jesus’ fulfillment in the new covenant.

## 11/13 Matthew 5:23-24

*23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

One of the greatest detriments of our fallen nature is pride. I am not referring to pride in our work or doing a good job, but rather the pride that says, “I am right!” Our egos often separate us from one another. The second great command is to love our neighbor as our self. We are all made in the image of God. We all have value before God. We may not agree, but we can do so lovingly.

To make sure that we maintain the love we should have for one another, Jesus reminded us that we can’t be right with God if we are being disobedient to Him. If we want to give a gift to God for all His goodness, we should first be obedient. That often means to forgive someone of the wrongs they have done us, or apologize for offending a person. Relationships must be restored before God will accept our gift.

Notice that Jesus said, “your brother has something against you,” It may just be a perception that they were insulted or wronged. It doesn’t matter how real it is. That person perceives it as an offense. They expect an apology. Humble yourself and try to understand what they feel. Apologize even if you don’t think it is necessary. God thinks it is. The one who humbles him for the sake of reconciliation is obeying God.

Consider: This applies to taking communion and to prayer as well. If we want a real relationship with the Lord, we must walk in obedience, wherever possible mending broken relationships.

## 11/14 Matthew 5:39

*39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.*

Jesus was certainly not a doormat. We even see Him physically oppose evil as He drove out the merchants in the Temple. But when He was physically opposed, He never fought back and rebuked Peter for doing so (John 18:11). He knew that when we fight on the physical plane our efforts are often counter-productive. His words were His weapons. They worked on the mind and heart of man.

He fought on the spiritual plane, and that is where our efforts should be as well. When He healed people of physical afflictions, it was often a case of resisting a spiritual power. The Apostle Paul will tell us that our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces (Ephesians 6:12). The physical body is just a vehicle for the eternal soul. If we focus on protecting the physical body, we will lose the spiritual battle.

Jesus went on to say that if someone forces you to do or give something, respond generously. This shows that our hearts are not set on things of the earth, but in heaven. To be Kingdom minded is to focus on what is eternal and to put the physical things of this life in their proper place. The body and our possessions are temporary instruments to be wisely used at God’s direction. Our natural instinct is to physically resist one who is evil. By not doing so, we surprise them and may win their eternal soul. That is the real victory.

Consider: This is completely contrary to way of the world. That is why it is so powerful. It causes the attacker to feel a sense of shame and guilt which may be his or her first step toward salvation. The spiritually strongest person does not physically fight back.

## 11/15 Matthew 6:1

*1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*

Righteousness refers to all godly qualities that we can express, from genuine worship to serving others in Jesus’ name. But if acts of righteousness are done from an impure heart, they are not really righteous acts. There is a temptation to do good things while people are watching so that they will think you are special. We naturally love to hear those encouraging words that tell us how generous or godly we are. Be appreciative, but give the glory to God.

Jesus warned that when we fast or pray those times should be between us and God. If we practice our prayer to impress people, we’ve missed the whole purpose of prayer. If we can’t wait to tell someone how long we have been fasting, we are fasting for the wrong reason. If we give to have a bronze plaque commemorate our gift, we have given for our own glory and not God’s.

That which is done at the leading of the Holy Spirit and causes some sacrifice on your part should be between God and you alone. Then God will reward you for your service that came from a heart of love for Him. We shouldn’t obey and serve to get His rewards, but He delights to reward us when we have given to Him out of sincere love for Him.

Remember: As much as is possible and practical, let your sacrifices for God be a private matter that is just between you and your Savior.

## 11/16 Matthew 6:22-23

*22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 23 but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

To understand some of the Bible passages, we must understand some of the Hebrew idioms. They referred to a good or healthy eye to mean someone who saw the needs of others and was generous toward meeting that need. An evil or bad eye meant someone who was selfish and unconcerned about others’ needs (Proverbs 22:9; 28:22). Without understanding this idiom, we would think people with poor vision were evil.

Light and darkness are metaphors for good and evil. So in this verse we have an idiom with a metaphor. Jesus was telling us that the way we see the world and react to it tells others what is in our hearts. Those who are caring and generously act on the behalf of others are full of light, which is goodness and/or truth. Those who are selfish in their behavior with little concern for others are evil and that evil is very bad. Think of those who have had great power over men and used it to oppress and intimidate them into service. Some are so dark that they take lives without a thought.

We should allow ourselves to see the spiritual and physical needs of others so that the lamp of the eye fills our body with light. Selflessness is a sign of godliness. No one who is evil can genuinely give of themselves to others. This teaching is the basis for Jesus saying that the one who desires to be first among men must be the servant of all (Mark 9:35).

Consider: Your spiritual progress can be measured by your concern and generosity toward others. Do you have good eyes?

## 11/17 Matthew 7:21

*21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*

A great number of Christians base their understanding of salvation on chapter three of the gospel of John. They believe that to say “the sinner’s prayer” assures your salvation. Another group relies heavily on a passage that is a parallel to our verse today in which Jesus said that those who visit the sick and the prisoner, provide for the needy, and welcome the stranger will enter heaven (Matthew 25:34-36). They assert that doing good deeds proves you are going to heaven. Another says that only speaking in tongues (a heavenly language) can assure you are heaven bound (Acts 10:46-47).

In our passage for today, Jesus teaches that some will claim that they have prophesied, cast out demons, and done mighty works in Jesus’ name. Yet, Jesus will tell them that they must depart for He never knew them. Once again we find it is important to understand the use of the language to really understand the meaning. In the Hebrew culture, “to know” was used not only of “intellectual understanding,” but also of “an intimate relationship.” Those who did these works they are so proud of never had a relationship with Jesus. Saying the sinner’s prayer, praying daily, doing fine works, or displaying what some think are spiritual gifts may not mean a person has a relationship with Jesus. Salvation is a heart matter that results in outward transformation.

Jesus is clearly telling His audience that He is the Lord, and only having a relationship in which people allow Jesus to be intimate with them will mean they are of the kingdom of heaven. The question we often ask is, “Do you know Jesus?” It seems more important to ask, “Does He know you?” The Father’s will is to surrender our whole life to Jesus.

Consider: For Him to be Lord of your life means He must direct it. Are you allowing Him to direct you daily? Do you share your heart with Him and take the time to hear His heart?

## 11/18 Matthew 8:28-29

*28 And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. 29 And behold, they cried out, “What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?”*

Jesus was making his first trip with the disciples into a region that was mostly Gentile. While prophets of the past were sent to give God’s message to other nations, the religious Jews of Jesus’ day were reluctant to mingle with others for fear of being defiled. This passage describes the beginning of Jesus and his disciples reaching out to the world. It’s no wonder then that they encountered a storm on the way (Mark 4:35-41) and were met by a demon-possessed welcoming committee.

The demons are angels that followed Lucifer in his rebellion against God. They have been in the heavenly realms and instantly recognized Jesus and knew His title, Son of God. They even knew their eventual fate and that the time had not yet come. They pleaded with Jesus to send them into a herd of pigs. Once Jesus cast them out of the men and into the pigs, the pigs ran into the lake and drowned.

The economic loss of these animals that the Gentiles used for sacrifice to their gods caused the people to request that Jesus leave their area. It looked as though Lucifer had stopped Jesus through trickery. However, Jesus turned the defeat into a victory by sending one of the delivered men back to his home to tell what Jesus had done for him. When Jesus returned later, the people were prepared to receive Him.

Consider: What looks like defeat at the moment can be turned around by God to bring a greater victory at a later time. Don’t be discouraged. Trust God!

## 11/19 Matthew 9:5-6

*5 For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’or to say, ‘Rise and walk’?6 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, pick up your bed and go home.”*

Some men had brought their paralyzed friend to a house where Jesus was teaching but they could not get in because of the crowd. They broke through the roof and lowered the man down to Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he told the man that his sins were forgiven. Jesus noticed the reaction from the religious leaders. Only the one who is sinned against can forgive the one that sins. I can’t forgive you for something you did to someone else. You must seek forgiveness from the one you offended. We offend others, but all sins are sins against God in the final analysis. That is why the leaders were offended at Jesus claiming the man’s sins were forgiven. Who did Jesus think He was?

To help the leaders understand who He was, Jesus asked them a simple question: Is it easier to say to a paralyzed man, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Rise and walk”? They couldn’t answer because they couldn’t do either. Both are impossible with men. So that they would understand that He has authority to forgive sins, by His command the man was healed.

Jesus has authority to forgive because He is one with the Father. Our sins are sins against Him. Have you gone to the only One who can forgive your sins and asked for His forgiveness? He could forgive us all by His word alone, but so that the Accuser would never have legal grounds to ever bring charges against us in the future, Jesus paid the penalty for all our sins with His own blood upon the cross. If Satan ever questions the justice of forgiving this paralyzed man or you or me, Jesus can point to the payment He made in full for all our sins.

Consider: Now we should get up and live like we are on our way home!

## 11/20 Matthew 10:1

*1 And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.*

Jesus healed every diseased and afflicted person who came to Him for healing. We don’t have a single record of His failure to make a person whole. He was proving that He is Lord over all. His authority is supreme. The Apostles were charged with bringing His message to the world. Their authority to heal came from Jesus. It was given to verify the authenticity of the message.

We have never seen such power displayed before or since. Many people claim to have the same authority today, but when the person they pray for is not cured, they suggest that it is the person’s fault for not having enough faith. If that was the case, surely we would see similar accounts with the Apostles and Jesus.

The power of God to heal is certainly present today. I have witnessed a number of miraculous healings myself, but if someone had the authority to heal everyone who came to them, we would see a line of people day and night at their front door. Jesus can still heal all who come to Him, but if the affliction draws the person closer to God, why would He? He proved to the world His authority over all illness. He doesn’t need to do it again. But in places that never heard of the evidence, we still witness numerous miracles of healing, as He proves to that village or people that He has that authority. In some Muslim villages today, they know to send the sick to a missionary for prayer before they would go to an imam.

Consider: Where do you go first when you are ill? Certainly, God can use doctors to heal, but should we not first go to the One that has authority over all illness? Watch to see how God is using the illness in your life.

## 11/21 Matthew 10:19

*19 When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour.*

Jesus warned His followers that life would not be easy for them. There were a number of areas in which they would face persecution, legal systems, religious systems, and secular authority. In the verses that follow Jesus said that even our family will turn against us. That is because the way of Jesus is so different from that of the world. Our priorities in life will collide. We often find ourselves speaking truth that makes the world angry. The truth of God’s word convicts the world of sin. Their consciences will bother them, and so they will attack us.

Jesus said this is so that we can be a witness to them. Whenever we are given the opportunity to defend our faith, we are sharing to all within the sound of our voice the wonder of God’s love for us and the change He has made in our lives. That brings them to a decision of whether they will remain lord of their life or yield to the Lordship of Christ. In our verse for today, Jesus told us not to worry about what we will say. God will quicken to our minds the words we should speak. You will ride on the wind of the Spirit as He works through you to comfort you and deliver the truth to your accusers.

I have read accounts of these experiences in countries that are closed to the gospel. They are nothing short of miraculous experiences. God’s heart is to win our persecutors to Himself. That is an even greater victory than delivering us from persecution. It is our testimony through the difficult times that is most convicting to those who oppose us.

Consider: God will not only inspire your words in times of trial but also when you are sharing with those who are seeking the truth. Study and prepare, but trust God to uniquely give you the words for each situation.

## 11/22 Matthew 10:22

*22 and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*

The anti-Christian rhetoric in the world is definitely on the rise. Sometimes it is in response to the false representation of Christianity. Some people profit from gullible souls that are promised blessings if they will give. There are those who war in the name of Christ. Simply put, there are those who claim to be Christians who have none of His attributes. They misrepresent His name.

What has real Christianity wrought in the earth? The real fruit is transformed cultures that once brutalized one another, but who now live in peace and harmony. There are millions of addicts that are clean, sober, and happy. There are families that have been restored. In the bigger picture, the value of women has been raised, slavery abolished, and hope for eternity offered to mankind. So, other than the response to those who misrepresent us, why do people hate Christians?

The life of a true follower of Jesus declares that we are eternally indebted to the Savior whom we love. Those who reject the message of salvation resent the fact that we warn them of their eternal destiny. They wonder how we would be so brazen as to suggest they would be worthy of hell just because they insist on remaining the lords of their lives. Even the name of Jesus becomes a curse word to them. It’s no wonder then that Jesus said the world will hate us for His name’s sake. His name brings division because His message is bold and clear.

Consider: Those who endure in the faith to the end are individuals who each have truly made Jesus the Lord over his or her whole life.

## 11/23 Matthew 10:32-33

*32 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, 33 but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.*

In much of the world, Christianity is looked down on. A recent “study” in the country in which I live claimed that Christians were less intelligent than non-Christians. Jesus warned that this kind of animosity towards His followers would be common. I have been in conversations with people who were openly bashing the Christian belief. That is when this verse was quickened to my spirit. I could remain silent or I could declare that I am a follower of Jesus. If I deny Jesus before people, He will deny me before the Father. My heart sped up and I waited for a moment to speak up. “I am one of those people you are referring to as a ‘born-againer’.” The reaction to my statement wasn’t so bad. The person quickly changed the subject. Perhaps the people in that group had never met a true believer and were just repeating things they had heard.

God will provide opportunities for us to share our faith. Every time you are with someone who is in a crisis, you have the chance to share the only One that really helps us through those times of difficulty. You may have the prompting of the Holy Spirit to ask leading questions that invite people to talk about their faith. Jesus often used questions to lead into teaching and even taught with questions. That method is easier for us to receive because it is less threatening and invites us to reach a conclusion rather than telling us what to believe. Many standard confrontational witnessing methods cause people to put up their defenses. There is a time for confrontation as well, but most often people are more readily convinced by allowing them to come to the right conclusions.

You don’t have to be rude and obnoxious to acknowledge Jesus before others. A winsome, loving, and gentle approach is much more inviting. Let the Holy Spirit lead you. Remember, you aren’t trying to win an argument, but rather simply pointing to the One that has shown the greatest love ever displayed for us

(John 15:13).

Consider: Will you pray for opportunities to acknowledge Jesus before others and then watch for occasions to do so?

## 11/24 Matthew 10:42

*42 And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”*

We’ve seen that followers of Jesus can expect to be persecuted. Because God is our Father, we can expect that those who persecute us will one day be judged. Our verse for today tells us that those who bless us will be blessed. It is similar to the promise God gave Abraham (Genesis 12:3). Those who bless us will be blessed and those who dishonor us will be cursed.

Surely this applies to believers helping fellow-believers as well. If we really believed this, we would be looking for opportunities to bless God’s servants. Sometimes a group of pastors meets at the church where I minister. I always buy them lunch when they come because I believe this promise. Don’t think it just has to be pastors however. The humble, quiet servants of God may have a need that you can meet and thereby bring a blessing to you and to them. Rewards on this earth sit on a shelf and gather dust, but rewards in heaven will be something beyond what we can imagine.

There are only a few things Jesus promised to reward: those who receive persecution for following Jesus (Luke 6:22-23), giving to the Lord (Matthew 6:3-4), secret prayer (Matthew 6:6), secret fasting (Matthew 6:17-18), and loving your enemies (Luke 6:35). Giving to a servant of God is covered in giving to the Lord. What we do to the least of His brothers and sisters, we have done to Him. We don’t do these things just to get the heavenly reward, but certainly the promise of reward in heaven should add to the motivation to watch for an opportunity and rejoice when it comes.

Consider: Do you take these promises of Jesus seriously?

## 11/25 Matthew 11:6

*6 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”*

While imprisoned by Herod, John the Baptist heard about the miracles done by Jesus and His disciples. John sent his own disciples to ask if Jesus was indeed the Messiah. John had already proclaimed that Jesus was the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world before baptizing Him in the Jordan (John 1:29). We can only speculate what caused John to doubt. It may have been the difference in their calling and lifestyle. Or perhaps John wondered why Jesus did not rescue him.

Jesus told John’s disciples to go back and tell him what they saw and heard. The blind received their sight and the lame walked, lepers were cleansed, the deaf could hear again, the dead were raised up, and the poor had good news preached to them (Matthew 11:4-5). They saw the fulfillment of Messianic prophesies from Isaiah, the very book from which John often quoted (Isaiah 29:18-19, 42:6-7, 61:1).

When we don’t understand what God is allowing us to go through, we can take offense with Him. “Why did He let this happen? If He is really God, then surely He will deliver me.” When it comes to our own problems, we often have advice for God. Our situation may be the result of our sin or the sin of others or simply the results of living in a fallen world. God doesn’t promise to deliver us from everything that is difficult. He does promise to walk with us through it and cause it to result in good for those who love Him. John was soon beheaded. His work was finished, and he went on to his reward.

Remember: No one does wonders like Jesus. He can get us out of situations we don’t like, but if He leaves us there don’t be offended at the One who will walk with you through it and cause it to result in good. Cling to Him and be blessed!

## 11/26 Matthew 11:19

*19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”*

Jesus had explained that John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy regarding the return of Elijah. He was to come and prepare the way for the Messiah. He lived and ascetic life in the wilderness. Jesus’ ministry was in the villages and towns. He accepted invitations to dine. The religious establishment rejected both of them.

Jesus used a parable to explain what they were like. In most villages the only change in the routine of life was for weddings or funerals. The whole village would stop working and participate. Children would mimic those special times by playing flutes and dancing as if in a wedding or by singing dirges as if at a funeral. Jesus said those children illustrated what was going on when they said to their playmates, “We played the flute for you but you wouldn’t dance. We sang a dirge for you but you wouldn’t mourn (Matthew 11:17).”

In other words, John’s call to repentance didn’t stir peoples’ hearts. Jesus’ miracles didn’t either. It is easier to point the finger of accusation than to hear the message and be changed. They said John had a demon and that Jesus was a gluttonous drunk. But the proof is in the pudding. Wisdom is justified by her deeds. The acts of the wise will bear fruit unto God; hearts are transformed and lives are changed.

Consider: We must be careful when we are tempted to make accusations toward an effective ministry. Ask yourself if the message is true. The fruit of wisdom is lives drawn to God.

## 11/27 Matthew 11:27

*27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*

Jesus expressed His uniqueness in this verse. Coming from anyone else it would sound like the ravings of an ego maniac. But when you see the person who made such a claim healing every disease brought to Him, speaking such marvelous expressions, and commanding the elements of nature, you have to listen and consider that it is true. God the Father has handed over to Jesus all things!

The next claim is just as staggering. “No one knows the Son except the Father…” We could all say that no one knows us like God does, but Jesus is saying more than that. He is declaring that the only One that truly knows Him is God. He has been with God throughout eternity (John 1:1-2). The immeasurable riches of the Son’s nature are only known by the Father.

Perhaps most important of all is the final expression “and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” No one knows God except Jesus. However, Jesus can reveal God to whomever He chooses. At this point in Jesus’ ministry, the disciples did not know the way that Jesus was going make for us to be able come to the Father. It would be through Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself for us. Those to whom He chooses to reveal the Father are those who receive His gracious gift of forgiveness. We begin to see an increasing revelation of the Father in the life and attributes of Jesus.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for revealing the Father to us. Help us love Him more and more. Help us receive an increasing revelation of Him through Your life and the Word.

## 11/28 Matthew 12:6

*6 I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.*

The Temple was the one place of worship where God dwelt in the midst of His people. When Jesus declared Himself to be greater than the Temple, He was defending the right of His disciples to pick grain on the Sabbath. He said that the priests work in the temple on the Sabbath and are blameless. Because Jesus is greater than the Temple, certainly His disciples can work on His behalf and be blameless as well. But there is more to the statement. To be greater than the Temple would mean that the residence of God in their midst had moved from the Holy of Holies to the body of Jesus!

In this same chapter, Jesus will declare that someone greater than Jonah and greater than Solomon is present (Matthew 12:41-42). Jonah was perhaps the best example of a successful prophet to the Gentiles. Jesus was declaring that He would have greater success bringing Gentiles to God. That would fulfill prophecies about the coming Messiah (Isaiah 49:6). He is declaring He is the Savior of the world.

To be “greater than Solomon” would mean to have the greatest wisdom without compromising morality. Together these three declarations tell us that Jesus is the new temple where God dwells among us. He is the Messiah that will draw the world to God. His wisdom is the greatest wisdom ever expressed on earth. Once again we are confronted with statements that declare such greatness that we must come to the conclusion that He was insane or is uniquely the very Son of God.

Consider: Who do you say He is? Our eternal destiny depends on our answer.

## 11/29 Matthew 12:7

*7 And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.*

The religious leaders were watching Jesus and his disciples to try to find reason to accuse them of violating God’s law. One Sabbath, Jesus’ disciples passed by a wheat field and plucked some of the grain heads to eat. When the Pharisees saw this, they accused them of breaking the Sabbath. The Pharisees would have seen it as harvesting and winnowing the grain. They were being that petty in their interpretation of the law.

Jesus’ disciples were hungry. The law allowed a traveler to take from another’s field just enough for himself to eat. That wasn’t the problem. It was what the Pharisees saw as work on the Sabbath that was the issue. Jesus reminded them that King David violated a more serious law by eating the sacred Temple bread and giving it to his hungry men (1Samuel 21:1-6). He also reminded them that the priests work in the Temple on the Sabbath and are not violating it. With those two illustrations He was describing His disciples as spiritual warriors in God’s service.

Then Jesus turned the tables and told His accusers that they were the ones violating the Word of God. Hosea had written that God desires mercy and not sacrifice (Hosea 6:6). In the Hosea passage, God was accusing the people of forsaking their love for God and just going through religious routines. Jesus accusers had not learned the truth of that passage. The Word of God put them in their place. Love of God and mercy toward man go hand in hand.

Consider: Is your love for God expressed in your mercy toward others?

## 11/30 Matthew 12:31

*1 Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.*

Jesus healed a man who was blind and mute. The people were asking one another if this might mean Jesus is the Son of David. That was a title of the Messiah they were expecting to come. The Pharisees answered that Jesus was casting out demons by the prince of demons. Jesus said that it was by the Spirit of God that He had performed the miracle and then spoke our verse for today.

There are many different interpretations for just what this means. The context is essential for understanding the expression. The Pharisees were attributing a work of the Holy Spirit to the demonic realm. The Spirit of God was revealing that Jesus is the Messiah by the liberation of the demon-possessed man. The Pharisees were telling the people the miracle was really an expression of evil. Not only were they calling light darkness but they were attempting to keep people from the light.

Remember that the Pharisees were very religious men. Jesus was not conforming to their religious forms. It appears from the context that we can be so proud of our religious expressions and positions that we can be blinded to the truth when it stares us in the face. To call the work of the Holy Spirit drawing people to Jesus an evil thing is blaspheming the Spirit. It shows a hardened heart toward God and a desire that others be hardened as well. Jesus followed up by saying that people could blaspheme Him and be forgiven. We might not understand His actions or may misinterpret His intent. However, when one speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will never be forgiven.

Prayer: LORD Jesus, help our hearts to always be sensitive to the Spirit and to recognize His work in the world. Keep us from religious form and pride that hardens us to the work of the Holy Spirit.

December

## 12/1 Matthew 13:33

*33 He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”*

A little bit of God in your life is likely to take over your whole life. If you are really yielded to God in one area, you’ll find the need for Him take over every area. Some people want Him in every area but their finances, but finances are directed by the heart. If God has part of your heart, you won’t be at peace until He has it all. Then your finances will be His as well.

I’ve seen this parable play out in families. One person is converted and begins to increasingly walk in newness of life. Before long, the whole family belongs to Jesus. When it happens to a church or community it is called revival. It doesn’t mean everyone is converted, but the influence of believers walking in the fruit of the Spirit affects every aspect of an area.

It happened during the first centuries in Rome. At first, converts were persecuted for not worshiping the city gods. Then when plague struck, only the believers would stay behind to care for the sick. Some of the sick would be converted. Then their family was converted. In the following centuries when the women would throw away their baby girls, the Christians would find them and take them home and raise them to be godly women. When Roman men wanted to marry them, the men had to first convert to Christianity and show signs of a genuine transformation before these godly women would become their wives. Eventually the entire nation was influenced by Christianity. Even the coliseum was shut down because a martyr jumped into the arena and pleaded for the bloodshed to stop.

Prayer: Lord, please help me allow the leaven of the kingdom of heaven to permeate my life so that it might leaven my home, community, and nation.

## 12/2 Matthew 13:52

*52 And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”*

A scribe in Jesus day was also called a “rabbi.” They gave their life to the study of the laws of Moses. Though they made their living from another occupation, their main concern was the law and teaching it to others. Jesus often spoke against the scribes, but here He spoke of a scribe trained for the kingdom of heaven. One such scribe was the Apostle Paul.

When you read the writings of Paul you will find he exemplifies this verse. He always backs his statements with Old Testament passages. He has new applications from the life and teaching of Jesus as well as divine revelation, but he always confirms them with quotations from the ancient Scriptures.

The Christian today should have the same balance of Old and New Testament treasures. We often find an overemphasis on the New Testament to the exclusion of the Old. If we don’t study the Old, we will not understand all the references to it in the New. We can easily misinterpret a passage because we don’t know the context of the quote from the Old. The authors of the New Testament knew that the Old was inspired, and that is why they applied it as the proof of what they were writing. Don’t neglect your study of the Old Testament or you will never understand the depth of the New Testament.

Consider: The Old Testament is the New concealed, while the New Testament is the Old revealed. The message is the same.

## 12/3 Matthew 14:13-14

*13 Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

Jesus had just received the news that Herod had executed John the Baptist. John had prepared the way for Jesus. Surely Jesus knew that He would be next. The world will not tolerate for long those who boldly proclaim the truth. Jesus wanted to be alone. He took one of the small boats from Capernaum and headed toward Bethsaida.

If you had stood on the northern shore of Galilee, you could watch the entire journey. The crowds could see where He was headed and ran ahead to the place He would land. He was their only hope to heal a family member or friend. If there was someone today that really healed like Jesus, the same kind of crowd would always be at his or her door. You probably know someone with a chronic disease who you would take to Him. Can you imagine the desperation of the ill?

Instead of finding solitude and rest, Jesus was met by a great crowd. He could have retreated to the boat and moved on, but His heart was full of compassion. He healed the sick and then miraculously fed the multitude. Surely as he sailed he could see the people moving along the roads toward His destination, but He went anyway. Many times the needs of others will outweigh our own. Jesus shows us that by the power of the Spirit we can set aside our own needs, even in times of grief, and minister to others. He would find some hours alone with His Father later that evening, but He would then have to rescue His disciples on the lake shortly before the next morning.

Consider: Jesus put the needs of others before His own. If we would follow Him, His Spirit can give us the compassion of Jesus. Is there someone that God would have you reach out to today?

## 12/4 Matthew 14:27

*27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying,“Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”*

Jesus’ disciples were struggling to keep their boat from sinking in a storm when Jesus came to them walking on the water. It was night, and they thought they were seeing a ghost that had risen from the depths of the lake. They may have though it was coming to take them to their death. Jesus called out to them and said, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” What a relief they must have felt upon recognizing the voice of Jesus.

Throughout the Scriptures the ultimate assurance that God gives is that He will be with us. Isaac (Genesis 26:3), Jacob (Genesis 31:3), Moses (Exodus 3:15), Joshua (Joshua 1:5), and Zerubbabel (Haggai 2:5) were all reassured with the promise of God’s presence with them. What greater assurance could we have in times of fear than to know that the One who planned our life and who is all-powerful and all-knowing is right there with us? Is there any storm of life that God cannot see us through? That is the reason we need not fear. That should change our whole perception of every situation.

God is always present in every moment and every place. The question is not one of Him knowing about your need, but whether or not He is going to assist you. The ones who can take heart and not fear are those who belong to Him. Those who are in rebellion against God should fear the fact that He is present. Those who love Him and live for Him are comforted by His presence.

Consider: No matter how powerful the storm, God will see that those who love Him come through in a way that works for their eternal good and His glory. That specter that you fear is not a ghost that has come for your soul. It is Jesus coming to save you. Take heart fellow believer. He is with you.

## 12/5 Matthew 14:35-36

*35 And when the men of that place recognized him, they sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick 36 and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.*

In the previous book, *Through the Bible Daily Devotional,* I explained that the Jews expected the Messiah’s tassel would heal those who touched it. God instructed the Jews to take the threads at the corners of their clothing and tie them into a tassel to remember the Law (Numbers 15:38-39). Orthodox Jews today still wear these on their prayer shawls. They consist of 613 threads that represent each law in the Old Testament. It is tied in five knots to remember the five books of the Law. The fact that Jesus wore this tells us He kept every instruction of the law. Most likely He would have worn a phylactery as well. It was a small box worn on the forehead that contained a portion of Scripture.

Jesus’ boat landed to the west of Capernaum in a town called Genneseret. The Greek word used here *(epiginosko)* is translated as “recognize”. This may mean that they realized He was the Messiah. That is further evidenced by the request of the people to touch the fringe of his garment. We don’t know where the tradition started, but apparently it was valid. The tassel of the Messiah was a conduit for healing. By touching it they expressed their faith that He was the Savior.

However, this did not necessarily mean they believed He was God incarnate. It is more likely they believed He had come to deliver them from Roman oppression. Jesus has come for a much higher purpose, our eternal salvation. Not all who acknowledge Him as the Messiah are seeking what He came to bring. He was ushering in the kingdom of God. That is God’s reign in the hearts of men. Many would rather try to reign over God by telling Him what they want done.

Consider: Why are you seeking God? Is it for anything besides His beneficent reign over your life?

## 12/6 Matthew 15:11

*11 it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.”*

While much of the world is hoping to have anything to eat, the developed nations are obsessed with eating healthy foods. The Jews had numerous food laws regarding what they could eat, along with superstitions that evil could enter your body through defiled food, utensils, or unwashed hands. They were partly right in that germs can make one sick. However, germs and evil are very different things.

Jesus said that what comes out of the mouth is what defiles a person. He went on to explain that evil thoughts, murder, adultery, immorality, theft, false witness and slander all come from the within. Acting on the evil desires of the heart is what defiles man. All those evils are in the heart of every man and woman, but acting on them is defiling. Jesus was trying to help them see that the religious ritual of washing hands before eating had nothing to do with becoming evil. Evil starts within and works its way out if you allow it.

The danger of defilement is from within, not from without. That which tempts us from without is only tempting when it corresponds to a desire already in our wicked hearts. The Proverbs tell us to keep our heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23). We don’t need to look outward for contaminating evil nearly as much as we need to look inward and see where our heart is going astray.

Consider: We are often upset about evil in the world around us while forgetting to examine our hearts for evil within. It would be a healthy spiritual practice to ask the Lord to reveal to you if your heart is going astray in some area.

## 12/7 Matthew 15:32

*32 Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.”*

On Jesus return trip from an excursion through the Gentile region of Decapolis, He stopped near the shore of Galilee to minister to the crowds that had followed Him. They must have been comprised mostly of Gentiles from those cities He passed through. For three days He taught and healed somewhere along the southeastern shore. He had previously fed the 5000 Jewish seekers on the northern shore. In that account Matthew mention His compassion too. Though He had spent days ministering to their spiritual need, He was also concerned for their physical need of these 4000 Gentiles (and that is only counting the men). If it was true for them, it is true for us as well. Jesus knows your physical needs.

Jesus is unwilling to have us go without our necessities. What a comforting thought. We are often focused on making sure that we have these things, but we should never worry. The One who has all power and who feeds the birds and clothes the grass of the field knows our needs. If we seek His kingdom first and foremost, surely He is unwilling to send us away without the necessities of life (Matthew 6:25-33).

Jesus fed them just like He fed the 5000. He met their spiritual and physical needs, and He will meet ours as well if we will follow Him. As the hymn writer penned, “What have I to dread, what have I to fear, Leaning on the everlasting arms. I have blessed peace, with my Lord so dear, Leaning on the everlasting arms.”

Consider: Are you worried about your spiritual or physical needs? You don’t need to be, if you are leaning on the compassionate arms of Jesus.

## 12/8 Matthew 16:4

*4 An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. “So he left them and departed.*

God had given Moses several signs to prove to the elders of Israel that he was sent by God. The religious leaders thought Jesus should show some miraculous signs to prove that He was the Messiah. Jesus refused to do so. He had already fed a group of 5000 and another of 4000. He had healed all who came to Him with demon possession or illness or injury, which fulfilled the prophecies in Scripture regarding the Messiah. To have given another sign at their demand would have been to encourage their hopes for a military deliverance from Rome.

Jesus told them it was an evil and adulterous generation that sought a sign. Man wants to see the miraculous instead of believing the Word by faith. That is evil because it puts our senses above the Word of God. You will know the godly by the fruit of their life (Matthew 7:20). In the end time, even the Antichrist will perform signs and miracles (Matthew 24:24).

There was one sign that would be given, the sign of Jonah. After they killed Jesus, He would rise. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish, Jesus would be entombed and rise from death. It is an irrefutable sign. Others have been raised from death, but He alone has conquered it. It is the one sign we all need, to know there is hope beyond the grave. It is a sign that says His sacrifice of Himself on our behalf was accepted by God. We need not fear death or judgment if our faith is placed in the victorious One.

Prayer: Thank You Lord Jesus for doing for us what we could not do! Thank You for the hope and assurance that Your resurrection gives us. Help us to live by faith in Your Word.

## 12/9 Matthew 16:6

*6 Jesus said to them, “Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”*

The Pharisees and the Sadducees were the two main groups of religious leaders of Judaism in Jesus’ day. While they differed quite a bit on doctrine, they did have one thing in common. They thought they were above the common people. They referred to most of the common people as “sinners.” That would imply that these leaders thought they were not sinners. They even dressed in a way that would set them apart and did not want others to touch them. Instead of being humbled by the Scriptures they knew, they were proud that they knew so much.

The passage goes on to say that Jesus was referring to their teaching, but we can see in other passages that Jesus also warned them regarding their behavior. They loved honorary titles and the respect of man. They made a show of their prayers and other religious obligations, but did not deal with their own hearts. They applied the Scriptures to others, but not to their own lives. Perhaps worst of all, they manipulated the Scriptures to their advantage.

Jesus was warning of their teaching but also of religious pride and self-exaltation. The more we know, the more humble we should be. The closer we are to God, the more compassionate we should be toward others. True holiness lies in applying the Scriptures to one’s own heart first and foremost. Detail to religious duty can only be considered a good thing when one is walking humbly with God (Matthew 23:23; Micah 6:8).

Consider: As you read these devotionals, resist the tendency to apply them to others. Listen to what God’s Spirit would apply to your heart. Beware of the tendency to do things to flaunt your religion for others to see.

## 12/10 Matthew 16:18

*18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

Jesus had taken the disciples to a Roman city at the base of Mount Hermon. The Jordan River came from a cave at the foot of this mountain. The Romans had built a temple in front of the cave to worship their god Pan. In the niches carved in the face of the cliff were statues of Roman gods. It was an appropriate place for Jesus to ask the disciples if they understood who He is.

Peter answered that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus told Peter that he didn’t come up with the thought on his own. The heavenly Father had revealed it to him. There are no punctuations in the language in which the Bible was written. Jesus went on to say that Peter, whose name is the masculine form for “rock” *(Petros),* was indeed a rock. The controversy in doctrine comes in whether there should be a comma or a period at this point. Is Peter the rock *(petra* – feminine) upon which the church would be built. Or was Jesus referring to the truth that He is the Messiah, the Son of God, as the truth upon which the church would be built?

The Gospels tell us several times that Jesus is the chief cornerstone over which men stumble (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17-18). The apostle Paul makes it even clearer when he tells us in Ephesians 2:20 that all the Apostles make up the foundation of the church, but Jesus is the cornerstone. The church is built upon one man, the God-man, Christ Jesus. Peter was indeed a rock in the foundation of the church, but it all takes shape based upon the cornerstone, Christ Jesus.

Consider: The church soon broke into factions following individual men. The only way it is ever in unity is when Jesus is the rock upon which all else is built. Take care that your focus does not shift to anyone or anything other than Christ Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

## 12/11 Matthew 16:27

*27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.*

The justice of God not only demands punishment for wickedness, but reward for godly actions. We should do what is good without any expectation or motivation of reward. Good is its own reward. However, God promises multiple times in both the Old and New Testaments that He will repay each person according to his or her deeds.

If we were to only read this passage, it would sound as if salvation is based on works. That would be an incomplete understanding of Scripture and our condition. The only way we can ever even begin to do what is truly good is by receiving the grace of God by faith. Then by faith we let Him work through us what is truly good. Without Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5), that is, nothing that is truly good.

Why would God repay us for the work He does through us? Think of a father rewarding his child for a chore that the father helped the child do. The child should do the chore because of all that he has received from the father. The father even shows the child how to do it and helps them learn to do it right, yet the father blesses the child with an allowance. He is teaching the child what is good and how to go about it and rewarding the child for learning. Yes, we really are that needy and that blessed! (John 1:12)

Consider: Humbly realize how needy you are and how blessed you are to have such a gracious heavenly Father. You can lay up treasure in heaven!

## 12/12 Matthew 17:12

*12 But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.”*

The disciples had heard the Bible scholars teach that Elijah would return before the Messiah would come. They asked Jesus about this because they understood Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus explained that the prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist. He had the spirit of Elijah and prepared the way for the Messiah by calling people to repent and make their hearts ready to receive Him.

While many did repent, most of the religious leaders hardened their hearts. Though these leaders taught that we are just passing through this world, like their forefathers, they had grown quite attached to it. Their treasures were wealth, position, and power. John and Jesus challenged that lifestyle and taught that our hearts must be fixed on God as our greatest treasure and source of joy. It was a return to the mindset that we are only pilgrims here. The material things the religious leaders clung to had become idols in their hearts.

Jesus knew that they would do to Him what they did to John. A few verses later (Matthew 17:22-23), Jesus told the disciples that He would be handed over to be killed, but that He would rise again. Unlike John, Jesus’ death would end in victory over death for all who make Him their treasure. Jesus’ great challenge to mankind was what He said was the greatest command: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). Your heart will be with whatever you treasure. If you treasure something other than this world, it will result in treasure in heaven with persecution here. It is evidence that you are living in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:12).

Consider: Where is your treasure? Your life declares what you truly value.

## 12/13 Matthew 17:24-25

*24 When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, “Does your teacher not pay the tax?” 25 He said, “Yes.”And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?”*

The Laws of Moses provided for a tax to be received from every male older than 20 years of age whenever a census was taken (Exodus 38:26). It was called an atonement offering because a census was only taken when preparing for war. The whole purpose of the tax was later changed to be a support for the upkeep of the Temple. Those who collected the tax were wondering if Jesus would argue against the change in the purpose of tax.

Apparently Jesus and His disciples had no money. They were living by faith and trusting God to provide their needs. Jesus gives a perfect example here of doing something so as not to offend others, even when it is unnecessary and costs you to do so. God miraculously provided for Jesus’ and Peter’s tax. Peter was evidently the only disciple over 20 years of age.

Jesus helped Peter understand why his answer was hasty. A king’s family is not taxed for the maintenance of the palace and government. The temple was Jesus’ house! He called it “My house” in Matthew 21:13. That means that His household, which included the disciples, were the ones that should be receiving the tax money, not paying it. There are several great lessons here. We are to go out of our way not to offend those who are ignorant of the truth. Jesus saw the Temple as His house. It was the house of God. He considers His disciples a part of that household, sons and daughters of God.

Consider: If you are a disciple of Jesus, you have the status and benefits of being in the household of the King of kings.

## 12/14 Matthew 18:7-8

*7 “Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! 8 And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire.*

The word that is translated “temptations” is also translated “stumbling blocks.” The Greek word literally means “the trigger on a trap.” Once the trigger is moved the trap springs shut capturing the prey. The world referred to in the verse is the fallen condition of mankind and his perversion of the good things of God. Traps take all kinds of forms. Some work on our physiology but most of them work on our imagination. They promise us things they will never deliver. Instead we find ourselves ensnared by them. The promise of sin never lives up to our imagination, and our imagination can never reach the full wonder of intimacy with God.

Why must temptations come? The very fact that there was a prohibition in the Garden of Eden became in Eve’s heart a temptation to disobey. Satan promised her what was partially true and it played on her imagination. The result was catastrophic. We live with it daily. Without prohibitions and freedom there is no choice. We must learn that nothing in all creation can substitute for God.

Jesus spoke more on the topic of hell than any other Biblical character. Being ensnared by temptation can lead us to hell. It is so serious that Jesus said we should do what animals in the wild do when caught in a snare. They will chew the ensnared limb off to escape and live. What an analogy Jesus has set before us! We must deal seriously with temptation. It is a life and death issue. Escape into the arms of Jesus.

Consider: Has your imagination been taken captive by a lie? How will you cut it off? Will you fill the longing in your heart with the only One who can fill it?

## 12/15 Matthew 18:20

*20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*

This is frequently quoted in a way that is out of the context in which it was spoken. Jesus was teaching how to resolve conflict in the church. As a last resort, the offender was to be taken before the congregation. If they would still not repent, they were to be considered a non-believer. When the true church is united in a judgment, then we can know that the Lord was with them in the decision.

A true church of Jesus will have a heart of compassion. Jesus was telling His disciples that He would be with them so that when they faced these difficult decisions they would not be remorseful for doing what had to be done or second-guess their decisions. The Lord was with them in making the decisions.

Therefore, when we use this verse to say the Lord is with us when we worship together with two or three people, we distort the meaning of the verse. The Lord is with one person that worships Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). There is something special about uniting our hearts to worship, but it is not that the Lord is only present when two or more gather in His name. It is the unity of the body of Christ, sharing our hearts for the Lord, and the encouragement we derive from it (Hebrews 10:25).

Suggestion: When you hear the verse used out of context, you are presented with a teaching opportunity. Use it with humility and respect while aiming to encourage those you are instructing.

## 12/16 Matthew 18:21-22

*21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” 22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy- seven times.*

Forgiveness is a difficult but very important task. Jesus went on to tell a parable that explained the reason we need to forgive. The parable told of a servant who was forgiven an enormous debt, but then turned around and refused to forgive a fellow servant a very small debt. His master heard about it and changed his mind about forgiving the enormous debt and had the first servant delivered to torturers until that debt was paid.

The point of the parable is that we are all forgiven by God of more than we could ever pay. Having received so much grace, we should certainly be gracious and forgiving with others. If we aren’t, God will cease to be so gracious toward us. Jesus said the same in His comment on the prayer He taught to His disciples (Matthew 6:14-15). God expects us to learn from the way He deals with us.

The warning at the end of the parable is that we will face torment if we do not forgive others. The torment is often our own unforgiveness. We play the offending scenario over and over in our minds as it eats at our soul. The offender probably doesn’t even remember the event, but we certainly do. Instead of letting it go and moving on, we cause ourselves to relive the painful experience again and again. Not only is unforgiveness refusing to show the mercy we have received, but it tortures us again and again. Peter was asking how many times a person might receive forgiveness from repeated acts against us. We may need to forgive the same act seventy-seven times, or every time it comes to mind until we are able to let it go.

Consider: If you allow unforgiveness to remain in your heart, you hurt yourself and those who endure the bitterness it causes in your life. Recognize how much God has forgiven you and find His strength to forgive those who have offended you.

## 12/17 Matthew 19:8

*8 He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.*

The rabbis at the time of Jesus had differing opinions on what were reasonable grounds for divorce. Some were extremely lenient and taught that for almost any reason a man was free to give his wife notice of divorce. The man who asked Jesus if that was so was probably not looking for the answer Jesus gave. He most likely sided with those who had only a few very specific reasons. Jesus turned it into just one.

Jesus taught that only in the case of adultery was the man free to divorce his wife. Jesus’ reason was based on what God said in Genesis to the first couple. The two will become one flesh (Genesis 2:24). If God joined them then man should not separate them. The man asked why Moses gave a commandment concerning divorce. Didn’t that contradict what Jesus just said?

Jesus replied that it was because man’s heart is hard. Since men were going to divorce regardless of what God had said or willed, Moses gave guidelines. At the end of this teaching, Jesus said: “not everyone could receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.” Some people were even meant to be single. Some are intentionally single so that they can focus on serving God. Man has always struggled in this regard, but that is because we are such selfish creatures. The most beautiful marriages are those in which both spouses die to the selfish nature to serve each other. That is the picture of Jesus and His true church (Ephesians 5:32).

Consider: Marriage is the training ground to learn that joy can be found in living for another.

## 12/18 Matthew 19:14

*14 but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”*

This passage always reminds me of a time at Capernaum when I had grown my hair and beard for an Easter production. A number of nationalities had spontaneously gathered to sing praise songs. As we left, women with children came to me to ask me to pray for their children. It was a very moving experience.

The disciples did not want Jesus to be bothered with the children, but ordered the disciples to let them come and not hinder them. The reason was that the kingdom of heaven belonged to such as these. Jesus must have been referring to their innocence and dependency on their parents. They are eternal souls that have yet to be corrupted by all the temptations of this world. In their simplicity and purity they show us the peace of simple trust and the joy of living.

Surveys have shown that the majority of believers in Christ made the decision to follow Him before they became adults. That is not because they were ignorant, but rather it was because their souls were less corrupted by the enticements of the world. How we need to reach out to the youth with the gospel before the world sinks its hooks into them. We are responsible to share the Bible stories and our testimony with our children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews, and all children we have the privilege of being with. Let them come to you. Enter their world and play with them on their level, and find the opportunity to share Jesus with them.

Consider: As we grow in Christ we should also demonstrate that childlike trust in God and the joy of simple pleasures in every day. Have you forgotten how to have real fun, like sledding down a snowy hill, or jumping into a lake, or catching a fish, or how about playing hide-and-seek? Children love it when adults enter their world and share their joy. To such belongs the kingdom of heaven.

## 12/19 Matthew 19:17

*17 And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”*

In the account both in Mark and Luke, a rich young man addressed Jesus as “good teacher.” There are those who compare the gospels to find discrepancies and then try to decide which account they will consider authentic. Since I am convinced that each is inspired, I look for how they must complement the other. The man must have called Jesus, “good teacher” and also asked about what “good deed” he could do to earn salvation.

Then the critics would say that Jesus was declaring that He was not God by saying “there is only one who is good.” That clearly contradicts many of the passages quoted by Matthew equating Jesus with the LORD in the Old Testament. (see *Divine Messiah?*) Is there another possibility? Could Jesus have been asking the man if he understood that Jesus was God in the flesh who had come to provide the salvation he was seeking? That possibility is more in line with the context of the gospel of Matthew.

Jesus asked if he had kept the commandments, and mentioned a few but not the tenth which was one the man was having trouble keeping. When the man said he had kept them, instead of quoting the tenth, “You shall not covet,” Jesus went to its application. “Go and sell all your goods, give to the poor and follow me.” Break the hold that coveting wealth has on your life and follow the One who is salvation. The man went away sorrowful because he was not willing to do that.

Consider: This account is not telling us we must take a vow of poverty, but rather that anything that keeps us from following Jesus must be forsaken. It may be the respect of men, or security in a job, or the comforts of location, or any number of things. We can’t serve two masters.

## 12/20/13 Matthew 20:15

*15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?”*

Jesus told a parable comparing the kingdom of heaven to a vineyard owner hiring laborers. He hired people to go work from early morning, others at nine a.m., others at noon, others at three p.m. and finally some at five p.m. That evening they all came to collect their wages. He paid those who started at five p.m. a day’s wages. He paid everyone else the same amount. Those who were hired first asked why they didn’t get more, but they had agreed to work for a day’s wage. The vineyard owner asked if he was allowed to do what he wanted with what was his. Did they begrudge his generosity?

While the Bible clearly teaches that we will each receive a reward according to our labor (1 Corinthians 3:8), we all receive the same great reward of eternal life in the presence of God. Some people begrudge those who come to Christ late in life while on death row in prison. They say it isn’t fair that God would forgive a life of sin and crime at the last second, like the thief on the cross next to Jesus (Luke 23:43). Those who ask that question don’t realize that salvation isn’t fair at all. Why should Jesus have paid anyone’s sin debt? If you came to Christ when you were five years old and from then on lived a holy life or at age 85 after a depraved life, either way, you must realize salvation is an undeserved gift of the grace of God.

It is hard for unbelievers to understand the pain and confusion that the five year old was spared from in this life. They can’t understand what a blessing it is to live in relationship with Jesus, the peace it brings, and the comfort in hardship. The angels rejoice over every soul that comes into the kingdom at any stage in life (Luke 15:10). A person may not even get a chance to enter into the vineyard to labor, and yet the same grace that saved the five year old saves them too. Rejoice with the angels. The purpose of Christ’s incarnation and suffering is fulfilled in each soul that is redeemed.

Consider: You may feel you have been a poor laborer. Remember that you are credited with the righteousness of Jesus. He started early and always did the Master’s will with all His heart (2 Corinthians 5:21).

## 12/21 Matthew 20:18-19

*18 “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death 19 and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”*

Jesus was about to make His last journey up the Jericho Road to Jerusalem. He knew exactly what awaited Him there. If you are reading this according to the date, you are probably contemplating the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. He knew before He descended to the womb of Mary exactly what He was to face and exactly why. He had come to give His life for the redemption of our souls (Matthew 20:28).

The process would be brutal because the world is fallen and its prince is Satan. Mocking began early on. I imagine there must have been much of it during His childhood. How would your schoolmates have treated the kid that never did anything wrong? Surely it continued later in His teen years when He would not join in conversations about girls. We know it did during His ministry, as the religious elite tried to besmirch Him. But the mocking by the Roman soldiers and from His fellow Jews while on the cross would be especially difficult to endure.

Flogging was called “half-death” for a reason. Crucifixion was the most torturous execution ever invented. At the end of these warnings Jesus added a promise when he said, “and he will be raised on the third day.” But they did not understand what He meant. It was with great trepidation that the disciples went up to Jerusalem. Jesus would not be dissuaded. He had come into this world to save mankind. There was only one way it could be done, and He was determined to do it. Oh how He loves you and me!

Consider: Shouldn’t I be just as determined to live for Him as He was to die for me?

## 12/22 Matthew 20:22

*22 Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.”*

The mother of James and John saw that this was going to be a climactic time. She expected the overthrow of the Romans and the establishment of a new Davidic kingdom. She asked Jesus if her two sons could be on thrones on Jesus’ left and right. Jesus told her sons that they did not know what they were asking. This was not about conquering armies, but about dying to self and suffering with Christ. Jesus asked if they were able to drink the cup He was going to drink. They said they were able, but I doubt they realized that He was referring to the cross.

If God were to ask, “Who wants to be Savior of the world?” many hands might go up. If He added, “It will mean mocking, beating, and a horrible, agonizing death,” I think most of those hands would go down. When you ask for gifts and calling into a particular ministry, be sure that you count the cost. Service to Christ in this world inevitably comes with persecution.

I often wonder if we misinterpret the return of Christ and what will happen then as much as the disciples misunderstood what was about to take place. Will we be as shocked as they were as things unfold? We won’t really know if we are able to drink the cup of suffering until it is handed to us. I do know that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). When the hour comes, we must rely on His strength and not our own.

Consider: Jesus told the church of Philadelphia that because they kept the word of His patience, He would keep them from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world. May God help us to keep Jesus’ word of patience (Revelation 3:10).

## 12/23 Matthew 20:30

*30And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!”*

The town of Jericho was known for its eye salve. Apparently it was not working for these two men. They were probably begging at the side of the road. Upon hearing that Jesus was coming they yelled out for mercy. They called Him, “Lord.” The term could simply mean an important person, or it could refer to God. They also call Him, “Son of David.” That is a messianic term. They expressed faith that He was the Messiah.

Luke’s account tells us that the crowd tried to quiet them, but they yelled all the louder (Luke 18:39). Jesus stopped and asked what it was they were asking. They pleaded to have their sight restored. Jesus answered their request. What the local eye balm could not do, the Son of David could do with His touch. Then they followed Jesus.

There is a world of spiritually blind people that think they can see. I live in a town where many are ready to tell you just what their imagination has seen, but they are spiritually blind. Only those who realize how spiritually blind they are will call out for mercy to the Messiah who can give sight to the spiritually blind as well as the physically blind. Jesus told the religious leaders that because they said they could see, their sin remained (John 9:41). If a person recognizes His blindness and calls out to the Savior, his or her sin will be forgiven and they will see.

Consider: Can you truly see? Have you called out to the Savior to have mercy on you? Pride thinks it can see and invents a scene that verifies its own supposed greatness. Humility knows it cannot see and pleads persistently for mercy and then waits for His touch. When real sight is given, we follow the Giver.

## 12/24 Matthew 21:9

*9 And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”*

It was five days before Passover. That was a special day for Jews. They chose their lamb that would be slain and eaten on that day. That is the day Jesus presented Himself, the Lamb of God, on the east entrance to the city. On the west, Governor Pilate and his forces would be entering to the cheers of those eager to please those in power.

The crowd that met Jesus was shouting something rather seditious. *Hosanna* means “to save now.” Son of David is a messianic title. If we transliterated it into a contemporary expression it could read, “Save us, New King David! Blessed is he who comes with God’s authority. May heaven deliver us!” That is why the Pharisees urged Jesus to quiet the crowds. But Jesus didn’t correct them. He had come from heaven with God’s authority as a new king to save our souls. All through the gospels we see people taking a physical interpretation of what Jesus meant in a spiritual sense.

We can be on the right side of the city with the wrong heart. There was little difference from the heart of those who wanted Jesus to boot out the Romans and those who wanted the favor of Pilate. Why have you come to Jesus? Why do you praise Him? It must be because of what He has come to do, not what you want Him to do. He has come with heaven’s authority to reign in the lives of those who will receive the salvation of their souls.

Consider: We are in His kingdom when we submit to His rule over our lives.

## 12/25 Matthew 21:22

*22 And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”*

Jesus had gone to a fig tree looking for a fig to eat, but it had none. He cursed it, and it withered. The disciples were amazed. They had seen Jesus heal all kinds of illness and deformities, even still the wind and waves, but this was different. Some people believe that the fig tree was symbolic of Israel. When God came via the life of Jesus looking for spiritual fruit, He found none.

Jesus told His disciples that if they had faith they could even command a mountain to be cast into the sea. John clarifies for us the parameters of this power in one of his letters. He writes, “If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1John 5:14). The faith must be faith in something. If it is to be all powerful, it must be in God and His will in a given situation.

Jesus may have been speaking figuratively, but the discussion centered on a very physical fig tree. I haven’t heard of any mountains jumping into an ocean. That would cause quite a tidal wave. I have heard many supernatural answers to prayers of faith and personally witnessed many. It is in prayer that we find God’s will. From there we can pray in faith and watch God do the impossible.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to discern Your will and know Your voice so that I may pray Your will into the earth.

## 12/26 Matthew 21:23

*23 And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”*

Jesus often shared a deeper meaning of the Scriptures. He never quoted other rabbis or the oral traditions as a source for His teaching. Other rabbi always taught by referencing what other more prestigious rabbis had said with the exception of those who had memorized the entire Old Testament and been ordained by two other rabbi who had done the same. These special rabbis taught with their own authority. That is what people said about Jesus: “A new teaching with authority” (Mark 1:22, 27)!

Essentially the chief priests and elders were asking of Jesus, *By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?*  In John 5:31-37 Jesus told them He indeed had two witnesses, John the Baptist and the heavenly Father. He also said the miracles He performed bore witness of His authority (John 10:25). He did not have to justify Himself to men, but He tried to help them see the evidence of His authority.

In this passage Jesus asked those who questioned Him where John’s authority came from. They couldn’t answer because they had rejected John although the people accepted him as a prophet. These religious leaders couldn’t accept the call to repent from John or from Jesus. Pride in our religious knowledge can keep us from the truth.

Our authority is found in the authority of Jesus. As we quote His words and act at the leading of His Spirit, we fall under the authority that sent the disciples into the world (Matthew 28:18-20).

Consider: We must always check our own souls to see if we are acting and speaking under the authority of Jesus or out of religious dogma. Are we arguing a point to prove our self-righteousness, or are we lovingly sharing the clear truth of Scripture at the leading of the Spirit? Are the fruits of the Spirit evident in our conversation (Galatians 5:22-23)?

## 12/27 Matthew 21:32

*32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.*

Jesus told a parable about two sons. One said he would do what his father asked, but never followed through. The other said he wouldn’t do what his father asked, but changed his mind and did it. Then Jesus asked the religious leaders which of the sons did his father’s will. They said the one that changed his mind did. Then Jesus pointed out that this was similar to the response to John the Baptist’s message. The religious leaders who said they would obey God did not repent. The crowd that had never promised to do God’s will did repent. Even when the leaders saw the changed lives they would still not repent (Matthew 21:28-32).

We can be so set in the pride of our dogma that even when we see the evidence we still refuse to change our minds. Repentance is a change of mind in the way we see things. The religious leaders missed the fact that all their efforts of obedience did not bring them closer to God. God’s righteousness is so much greater than man’s, and nothing short of it can be in God’s presence. We need God’s righteousness to be acceptable to God.

By changing their minds and repenting, they were preparing their hearts for the Messiah and His provision of righteousness. When we receive His righteousness, the godly actions come from the heart and not mere human effort. The very desires of our hearts are transformed through His indwelling presence. When our holiness is of Him, we have no room for pride.

Consider: Have you obeyed the message of John the Baptist? Have you had a change of mind? Where do you see lives being transformed in your community?

## 12/28 Matthew 22:11-12

*11 “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. 12 And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless.*

Jesus told a parable about a king who held a great wedding feast. When all was ready he sent his servants out to invite the guests. The guests made excuses and even killed some of the servants. The king sent the servants back out to invite everyone in until his house was full.

In Jesus’ day a wealthy person would provide an outer cloak for every guest as he or she entered the wedding celebration. Someone slipped in this feast without receiving the cloak. He did not go through the door. While the invitation was open to all, guests had to go through the door and receive the covering to be welcomed. When the king saw a man without a wedding garment, the king asked how he got in. There was nothing the man could say. He was cast out.

Jesus was describing entering the kingdom of God. All are invited, but many will refuse to come. They make all kinds of excuses. Others will even persecute God’s servants. Those who do respond will come and go through the door (John 10:9) and receive the covering of the righteousness of Christ. Everyone there will be beautifully clothed in Jesus (Romans 13:14). You can’t be there unless you come through Him and receive Him as your covering. Any who try another way will be cast out.

Consider: Jesus spoke in parables so that those who were willing to hear could hear and receive His message. But those who were unwilling to hear would not understand and therefore would not be even more accountable for rejecting Him. For those who are willing to hear, the message of this parable is clear. Jesus is the way to the Father. We must go through Him and receive Him as our covering to enter the kingdom of God.

## 12/29 Matthew 22:30

*30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.*

In the Israel of Jesus’ day, there were two main groups. The Pharisees believed in the words of Moses and the prophets, as well as the concept of heaven. The Sadducees only believed in the writings of Moses and did not believe in an afterlife or angels. Jesus’ belief in that regard was the same as the Pharisees, so the Sadducees tried to trip Him up with their best argument. If a woman’s husband died and she married his brother, and then he died and so on until the seven brothers had all been married to her, whose wife would she be in the resurrection?

Jesus told the Sadducees that they didn’t know the Scriptures or the power of God. Jesus revealed that neither we nor the angels will marry in heaven. God’s power is able to transform our bodies in such a way that intercourse is no longer a function. The relationship of a husband and wife is a picture of our intimacy with God (Ephesians 5:32). When we are with Him we will no longer need the picture. As wonderful as sexual intimacy is, our relationships in heaven will be even more wonderful and unlimited. The dedication of ourselves will be completely to God while also enjoying unhindered and pure communion with one another.

Jesus proof text for resurrection from the Torah was Exodus 3:6. There God said He is the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God spoke that to Moses indicating that they were still living. Jesus did not rebuke the Sadducees and ignore them, but tried to show them their error from the part of Scripture that they did believe.

Consider: As wonderful as marriage can be now, our relationship to God will be even more wonderful in the resurrection.

## 12/30 Matthew 22:45

*45 If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?”*

The religious leaders had failed to trap Jesus with their clever questions. Jesus then asked them a very straightforward question. Psalm 110 was a psalm that the Jews recognized as speaking of the coming Messiah. The psalm begins by asserting that the eternal God of Israel said to David’s Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” Jesus asked how David could call a descendant of his, “Lord.”

Jews knew that the prophets had said the Messiah was coming from the line of David. They considered a father to be greater than a son. Abraham was their great patriarch. His son, Isaac, was not quite as great. Isaac’s son Israel was not quite as great as his father, and so on. The prophetic psalm seemed to clearly break that pattern. How could David’s descendant be David’s master?

This interchange put an end to the religious leaders’ questioning of Jesus. They did not know what to say. If He was going to ask them questions, they were in trouble. Jesus was not playing their “gotya game.” He was trying to help them see that God had come in the flesh. Jesus was David’s Lord because He is the One that David worshiped. Jesus is one with God and chose to be incarnated in the womb of Mary to redeem mankind. I believe the religious leaders understood what Jesus was implying, for in a few days they would have Him arrested for claiming to be God.

Consider: Jesus is now at the right hand of God interceding for us. In God’s perfect timing every enemy of truth will be under Jesus’ feet. Jesus knew the suffering that lay before Him, but also the glory that would follow. Let us follow in His steps.

## 12/31 Matthew 23:3

*3 so do and observe whatever they tell you but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.*

Jesus’ harshest condemnation was spoken to the Pharisees. They were the group that taught the Scriptures and tried to live every minute detail of God’s law. In our verse today, Jesus told the people to listen to their teaching but don’t follow the way they live. This is where we get the expression, “Practice what you preach.”

Jesus went on to say that the Pharisees gave difficult instructions that they don’t attempt to follow themselves. They would make long public prayers so that all could see them. They loved their special titles such as, “father,” “rabbi,” or “instructor.” They loved seats of honor at gatherings. In fact, everything they did was a show to boost their standing in the eyes of others.

Jesus’ way was quite different. He would sometimes tell people He healed not to tell anyone about it (Matthew 8:4). His was a humble path that often walked away from adoring crowds. Every action was obedience to His heavenly Father and for the glory of the Father (John 5:19, 17:4). Jesus lived what He taught one hundred percent of the time. His life exemplified His teaching. If we follow Him, we should do the same. The world needs to see more examples of Christians living their faith. A life of service and love can speak much louder than a sermon.

Consider: The poet, Edgar Guest, once wrote, “I’d rather see a sermon than to hear one any day; I’d rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way. The eye’s a better pupil and more willing than the ear.” I would add, “I’d rather you would show me than to merely bend my ear.”

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