Through the Bible Again

Daily Devotional

Volume 2

Matthew 23 to Revelation

By Paul Wallace

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Dedicated with appreciation to Wayside Bible Chapel family and all those who have been so supportive in encouraging me to write this additional devotional.

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## 1/1 Matthew 23:24

*24 “You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!”*

Some people who are ignorant of the Bible believe that Jesus never made judgments. Most of chapter 23 of Matthew consists of Jesus’ statements of judgment against the Pharisees, a super-religious sect of the Jews. Today we are looking at His judgment against the Pharisees’ method of studying and applying the Scripture. They focused on tiny details rather than the major issues.

Previously Jesus had given an example. Depending on what the person swore by, the Pharisees would say the vow was binding or non-binding. They defined breaking the Sabbath by a multitude of details such as how far you could walk, how much weight you could carry, what specific actions were forbidden, and many others. In contrast, Jesus saw that the greater issues are honesty and integrity. The Pharisees forgot that the main reason for the Sabbath was to rest and worship the Lord for all His goodness.

For those who have been Christians for many years, it is easy to fall into the same error. We understand the major issues, but instead of keeping the focus there, we may tend to start looking at details and trying to define what actions are right or wrong. Can one go to a PG movie or is PG-13 all right? Does a specific Greek word in the text mean this or that? We tend to forget the overarching principles that are the foundations of our faith. We strain out a gnat and swallow a camel. We go to that PG movie because we placed it the in the unforbidden category on our list without considering what God would have us do.

Consider: Someone once wisely said we should major on the major issues and minor on the minor ones. Always consider the greater issue. How does it line up with the nature of God? What are the overarching Biblical principles? If you ask those questions, you won’t get lost in the details.

## 1/2 Matthew 23:26

*26 “You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.*

Jesus used harsh words to the Pharisees to open their eyes. He didn’t stop at calling them spiritually blind, but He went on to tell them what could help them see. While focusing on the external rules, they were neglecting their hearts. Our actions flow from our hearts.

This truth does not only apply to Jews trying to live out the laws of Moses, but it is essential for Christian behavior. The fruits of the Spirit must flow from the heart or our actions become hypocritical duty. We tend to see the Christian life as witnessing, Bible study, prayer, Church attendance, and other outward actions. However, real Christian life is an increasingly transformed heart from which flows true Christian actions. We must not forsake godly habits, but we must always endeavor to see that the goal of those habits is to yield our hearts fully to Jesus.

Holiness begins within and continues to be an inward work called “the process of sanctification.” While we are holy in the eyes of God because of Jesus’ payment for our sins, we are undergoing an inner transformation that increasingly results in outward actions that the Spirit of God directs with our wholehearted participation. It is a growth process.

Consider: It is important that we don’t focus on the unbeliever’s behavior when we share Christ, but rather on the need of his or her heart. As we grow in our knowledge of the Word and become increasingly sensitive to the Holy Spirit, we are convicted of behavior because our hearts have changed. Be gentle and patient with new Christians. Give the Holy Spirit time to work. It is better for them to hear His conviction than yours. The Spirit’s conviction goes to the heart, whereas man’s condemnation often just goes to the mind.

## 1/3 Matthew 24:5

*5 “For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray.”*

Jesus answered the disciples’ question about the sign of His coming by warning them multiple times about false christs and false prophets. The multitude of false spiritual leaders along with the gospel being proclaimed in all the world were the two signs he emphasized, and they go hand in hand. Satan will try to counter them with the proclamation of a lie. Jesus warned that these false teachers would even perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if it were possible, even the elect (Matthew 24:24).

I live in a town where we see this fulfilled on a daily basis. Signs for the New Age healers and psychic readers are on every corner. These false teachers claim to heal, talk to the dead, and see into our future. Most are simply frauds, accepting credit cards or travelers checks but preferring cash. Others are convinced that another power enters their bodies and performs these signs and wonders. That belief may be true. Those evil spirits they accept may be one reason our city has one of the country’s highest per capita suicide rates.

There are several notable differences between God’s children who have gifts of the Spirit of God and those who yield to the demonic realm. God’s children have the mind of Christ. They are humble and take no credit, giving all the glory to God. They wouldn’t think of profiting in some way from showing you the love of Christ. And perhaps, most importantly, they always point to the eternal hope for our souls found in Jesus alone. The demonic always feeds the pride of those it possesses and tells them they deserve honor, wealth, and praise. It feeds a hunger for personal power. Jesus has warned us of these false prophets and christs.

Remember: Humble obedience to God and His Word is the way of the Spirit.

## 1/4 Matthew 24:27

*27 “For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”*

Many believe that the kingdom of God comes in quietly as the world slowly converts to Jesus. They believe that once the world is full of people filled with the Spirit of God then the world will know the invisible reign of Christ. That may be true in an individual’s life, but certainly it is not what the prophets predicted, nor is it what Christ taught.

Jesus is not coming back in secret. He won’t come again in the humble state of a baby. He is coming in glory and every eye will see Him (Revelation 1:7). He is coming in power to execute judgment on the earth (Matthew 16:27). Though the world’s armies gather to resist Him (Revelation 19:19), they will be consumed by the breath of His mouth (Isaiah 11:4). Many will come to Christ before His return, but many more will reject Him (Matthew 7:13). To reject Christ is to reject Him as the way to the Father. It is a rejection of grace, mercy, and truth.

The prophet Amos told those who were looking forward to the Day of the Lord that it would not be what they expected (Amos 5:18). We can only look forward to that day if we have made Jesus the Lord of our lives and repented of our selfish ways. Jesus’ Second Coming is as sure as His first. The Father alone knows the day (Matthew 24:36). We should live every day as if He is coming today.

Consider: What would you change if you knew Jesus was coming today?

## 1/5 Matthew 24:34

*34 “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”*

This verse has troubled people who believe in the inspiration of Scripture. It has caused some to believe in a view that declares end-time prophecy was fulfilled during the conquest of Jerusalem in AD 70. Other people have decided Jesus was just wrong. I believe if we look carefully at the question and this partial answer from Jesus, we will see the inspiration of Scripture is amazing.

First, we must understand that the disciples asked two questions. When will these things happen, and what will be the sign of your coming (Matthew 24:3)? Jesus had just spoken of the destruction of the temple. The answer to when that would be was before that generation passed away. Forty years after Jesus gave the prediction of those magnificent stones being overturned, it came to pass.

But Jesus also spoke of “all these things” that included His return. The Greek word for “generation” means “a period of time, or a generation of people, or a nation.” A few verses later Jesus tells the disciples that only the Father knows when He will return (Matthew 24:36). So in regards to the second part of the question, the time of Jesus’ return, the generation could mean the period of time Jesus referred to as “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24). Some theologians call it “the church age.” “Generation” could also mean “the nation of the Jews.” While they were in exile for a long period of time, the nation was restored and presently exists. One word answered both questions. The destruction of the temple would come before that generation of people passed away and Jesus’ return would come before the church age ended or the Jews’ hope of a nation ended. How amazing is God’s Word that it can speak on so many levels! While some look for errors, believers continue to find wonders in every word.

Consider: In the next verse Jesus declares that His words would never pass away. Are you seeking out the rich treasures in God’s Word?

## 1/6 Matthew 24:44

*44 “Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*

Jesus warned the disciples to always be ready for His return. He emphasized the fact that we would not know when the moment would come. During the last two thousand years, the church has expected Christ’s return. As history unfolds, we can see prophecy fulfilled to a greater extent and continue to anticipate the Second Coming.

Jesus used an analogy that we often misunderstand. He taught that if the master of the house would have known the hour of the night a thief would attempt to break into his house, he would have stayed up to keep his house safe (Matthew 24:43). Certainly, Jesus is not saying He is a thief. We know from John’s gospel that Jesus referred to Satan as a thief (John 10:10). The expectation of Jesus’ return keeps us on guard against the Enemy robbing us of that hope by lulling us to sleep.

Another way to look at the same need in our lives is to realize that people die suddenly. There are accidents. There are unexpected health issues. Our lives are like a vapor (James 4:14). When that moment comes, we will stand before Jesus and give an account. I certainly don’t want to have to declare that I received His gracious gift of salvation and then spiritually slept until my time had come. Let us be about our Father’s business. Let us be intentional about being spiritually alert, aware that there is a thief that is waiting for an unguarded moment so that he might rob us. Let us keep our eyes on the heavens, expecting Jesus’ return.

Consider: What if He came today? Would He find you ready?

## 1/7 Matthew 25:13

*13 “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*

Matthew 25 consists of one parable about being ready for Jesus’ return, a second one about what to do while we are waiting, and an exhortation of what each looks like in practical terms. In the first two parables Jesus warns us that it will be a long time before He comes again. As we saw in the previous devotion and in the parable of the ten virgins, we are to live expecting Jesus’ return to be at any moment while at the same time preparing for a long wait.

In the parable of the talents, the king is gone for a long time. Two of his servants work eagerly to multiply what he has given them but one does nothing. The message here is that our time waiting for Jesus’ return is to be spent wholeheartedly going about the assignments He gives us.

In the final exhortation, Jesus tells us what investing in the kingdom of God looks like. It is caring for others by feeding the hungry, meeting their needs, and visiting the sick and those in prison. Jesus tells us that when we do this for anyone, we are doing it to Him. He takes others’ needs very personally. Our verse today puts it all together. Live every day as if it is your last. Be aware of the needs of others and meet them with the love of Jesus. Invest what God has given you in meeting the needs of others. While watching expectantly for Jesus’ return, run the race of life with endurance.

Prayer: Lord, please give me the strength to endure and the will to serve, knowing that in ministering to others I am ministering to You.

## 1/8 Matthew 26:56

*56 But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left him and fled.*

At the beginning of Matthew 26, Jesus warns that the time has come for Him to be delivered up and crucified. Later in the chapter He quotes Zechariah 13:7, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.” Jesus saw that prophetic passage was specifically referring to Him. Then when Peter tries to resist those who have come to take Jesus away, Jesus speaks our verse for today. Notice that Jesus refers to “prophets” in the plural form. More than one prophet had predicted the events that were unfolding.

From Jesus’ understanding and faith in Scripture, we can draw several conclusions. Prophecy will inevitably be fulfilled. It is not a possible future scenario—rather, it is certain. Jesus learned what would happen from the Scriptures. He taught His disciples to trust and believe the Scriptures. Even the last sentence in our verse for today, which describes the disciples’ desertion, is a fulfillment of Psalm 88:8 and Jesus’ prophecy in John 16:32.

Because Scripture is certain and unchangeable, shouldn’t we be looking to it as Jesus did? We may not have as clear an insight into the depths of meaning as He did, but we do have the Holy Spirit to teach us.

Consider: Are you hiding the Word in your heart? Are you watching it be fulfilled and marveling at its accuracy? Moses told the people of Israel that the Word God had given them was their very life (Deuteronomy 32:47). Is it your life?

## 1/9 Matthew 26:67-68

*67 Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, 68 saying, “Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?”*

To understand what is happening in this verse, we need to know a bit about the Jewish expectation of the Messiah. The Jews believed that when the Messiah came He would know things without the aid of sight or hearing (Isaiah 11:3). The Greek word “Christ” is the same as the Hebrew word for “Messiah.” By calling Jesus “you Christ,” they were mocking His claim to be the Messiah.

In Mark’s account of this event he tells us an additional detail. The Jewish leaders covered Jesus’ face before they struck Him (Mark 14:65). Jesus would not know from where the next blow would come. Then they commanded Jesus to tell the name of the person that struck Him. It was a way to ridicule His claim to be Messiah. What control Jesus had over His spirit! He could have named the person that struck Him, his sins, and every convicting detail of his life (John 4:17-18). He took the abuse in silence (Isaiah 53:7). He could have annihilated them with one angel. Instead, He loved them enough to silently make His way to the cross to save their souls and ours.

If we live a godly life in Christ, we will face abuse (2 Timothy 3:12). Will our lives be ones that follow the example of Jesus and bear persecution with silent dignity, or will we lash out? We must expect that the world will misunderstand us and treat us with contempt. It is blinded by sin. But let us rise above by the power of the Holy Spirit and see our situations from God’s perspective. Our light and temporary troubles are earning us a far greater weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). Remember what Jesus endured.

Prayer: Lord, when persecution comes, help me to rejoice in the fact that I suffer for You. Help me to bear it with patience by remembering the example You set.

## 1/10 Matthew 27:3

*3 Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders . . .*

Judas was the only disciple who was not from Galilee. He was Jesus’ treasurer even though he had a love of money (John 12:6). We can’t say for certain what was in Judas’s heart when he betrayed Jesus. The only thing we can clearly see is that he informed the enemies of Jesus as to where and when to capture Jesus. It was Passover season. The city of Jerusalem would have been extremely crowded. Judas had already negotiated a price for the betrayal. It was the same price a person would pay for a healthy slave (Exodus 21:32). It seems the Jewish leaders were shrewd negotiators, considering how little they paid as compared to how much they wanted Jesus dead.

Judas led the soldiers to Jesus and watched the arrest and conviction. Judas must have had some other outcome in mind, because when he saw Jesus was condemned, he brought back the money to the religious leaders who had paid for his information. He changed his mind. He knew giving back the money would not change the outcome, but he could not live with himself knowing the money was earned betraying the man who had trusted him for the last three years. Judas hung himself.

There are momentous decision points that turn our lives in one direction or another. If our fallen natures make selfish decisions, the outcome can be irreversible. Had Judas not taken his life, even he may have found forgiveness through repentance (Romans 10:13). He thought he could not live with his disgust with himself. However, that self-loathing is what drives us to God to find new life in Him. If you have made a decision from your carnal nature, you may be dealing with the long-term consequences, but you can find the forgiveness and new life you seek at the foot of the cross.

Consider: Jesus came to save sinners. The more we realize the depravity of our own sins, the greater our repentance and appreciation of Jesus’ sacrifice for us.

## 1/11 Matthew 27:18

*18 For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.*

Pilate made an attempt to have Jesus released. He knew that Jesus was popular with the crowds but that the Jewish leaders were envious of Jesus’ appeal. It wasn’t that the Jewish leaders thought Jesus was a threat to Rome. The leaders knew that was just a ruse that could be used against Pilate should he not do their bidding. It wasn’t even about their doctrinal differences with Jesus. Jesus taught the crowds to obey the teaching of the leaders. On many points the leaders agreed with Jesus’ teaching.

The reason they wanted Jesus dead was envy, plain and simple. He had the crowds. The people would gather around Jesus to hear His every word. Then the people would discuss and ponder what He said. They were awestruck with His miracles of healing. The contrast of Jesus’ power and authority with that of the religious leaders made their leaders look out of touch with the people and God.

Envy overcame their reason and religious desire. They ignored the Scriptures they could see fulfilled in Jesus. They thought that if they had Jesus put to death, their honored status would be restored. Did they really think they could kill the One who raised the dead? Envy can be a powerful emotion that causes us to be completely unreasonable to the point of our own destruction.

Consider: We tend to belittle and mock those of whom we are envious because they reveal our own inadequacies. Instead, we should look to see what we are lacking and be glad for the success of others. Churches in a community tend to consider their efforts in competition with one another. If those churches preach without heretical doctrine, we should be glad for their successes. Does it matter who God uses to bring revival? Do we seek our own glory or God’s glory?

## 1/12 Matthew 27:42

*42 “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.”*

The religious leadership gathered around the cross in an attempt to drive home their conviction that Jesus was not the Messiah (king of Israel), and especially not the Son of God. I imagine many in the crowd felt animosity toward Rome for carrying out the execution, but some were probably disillusioned with their own leaders. That is why those leaders thought it necessary to make a public display of what they thought was Jesus’ helplessness. We see their envy displayed in all its ugliness as they mocked the One whom they perceived was their competition for the respect of the people.

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness to prove He was the Son of God by throwing Himself off a high point in front of the crowds (Matthew 4:5-7). This is the same kind of temptation set before Him with words of this nature: “If you miraculously come down from the cross we will believe you are the Son of God, the Messiah.” But would they really? When He did something even more impossible, rising from death, they did not believe.

I have heard people say they will believe if they see a vision of Jesus telling them He is the only way to God. It does happen, especially in nations closed to the gospel. But in most cases, people that say they need a sign are like these religious leaders. It is an excuse to not believe and go about their selfish lives. God is pleased with faith. God has given us signs in nature and the Scriptures. He will even give us more, if we truly would believe. But He will not give us greater signs if they will only be a witness against us on the Day of Judgment.

Consider: The leaders acknowledged that Jesus saved others. He could have come down from the cross. However, He chose not to save His own physical life in order that He might save every soul that would come to Him. There are none as blind as those who choose not to see.

## 1/13 Matthew 27:54

*54 When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”*

Jesus’ life was the ultimate example of how a Spirit-filled person should live. His death was the ultimate example of how a believer should die. The centurion had seen many people die by crucifixion. It was a gruesome, drawn-out process. Jesus’ death was utterly unique. While enduring the worst pain imaginable, He spoke forgiveness for those executing Him. There was assurance for the repentant victim next to Him. He resolved the custody of His mother. He declared His work was accomplished. Instead of clinging to life, He released His Spirit to the Father. His courage and acceptance were probably as impressive to the centurion and his men as were the physical events that occurred.

From noon to the afternoon sacrifice, a period of three hours, darkness enshrouded the land (Matthew 27:45). I believe it was not an eclipse or cloud cover, but the thick darkness that could be felt, reminding me of the curse upon Egypt (Exodus 10:21). When Jesus released His Spirit and His body died, there was a great earthquake. People in Jerusalem witnessed departed saints walking the streets (Matthew 27:52-53). The centurion had never witnessed a crucifixion anything like this one. He was filled with awe and confessed that Jesus must be the Son of God.

This centurion and his men may well have participated in the scourging and mocking of Jesus, but when Jesus died they were trembling in fear. They had no doubt heard the accusations that Jesus claimed to be King of the Jews and even the Son of God. Now they confess that they believe it is true. It may well be that the prayer of Jesus was answered that very moment: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Consider: One of the most powerful tools of conversion throughout history has been the death of the martyrs. They followed Jesus’ example in life and in death.

## 1/14 Matthew 27:64

*64 Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.”*

The religious authorities went to the governor and asked for the tomb to be guarded because Jesus said He would rise on the third day. Their excuse was that the disciples might try to steal the body and claim Jesus rose from the dead, but that doesn’t really make sense. If no one saw Him alive, who would believe the story? And what if the body was later discovered? Certainly the Roman authority would have the power to search for it until they found it. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, the disciples would not have been inspired to risk their lives to proclaim the gospel.

Could it be that the religious leaders were more afraid of Jesus rising from the dead than the disciples were hopeful it would come to pass? Was it the leaders’ knowledge of Scripture that caused them to fear the possibility that He would rise? Did they really believe a guard of soldiers could keep the risen Messiah in the tomb? That sounds like a last-ditch effort to hang on to their power and positions.

Would Matthew have written our verse for today for any other reason than to record the factual event? If he were trying to propagate a myth, he certainly would not have raised the suggestion that the disciples could steal the body. Nothing in the physical or spiritual realm could stop Jesus from rising from death. Jesus was seen by hundreds of people. All the efforts of the religious establishment couldn’t stop the plan of God. Jesus was—and is—alive!

Consider: Nothing could stop Jesus from rising from death. Nothing can stop His inevitable return. How should we then live?

## 1/15 Matthew 28:9-10

*9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”*

It’s hard to imagine the shock they must have felt when they saw Jesus. If you had seen someone brutally murdered, put in a tomb, and then three days later turned around and saw that person alive and well, what would you think? The word translated “Greetings!” is most frequently translated “Rejoice!” While it was used as a greeting, it had extra significance when it came from a loved one that his family and friends thought was dead. That call to rejoice was not only for the two Marys, but for everyone that would receive Jesus’ victory over death. Jesus took care of our biggest problem, death. Rejoice!

They took hold of Jesus’ feet and worshiped Him. If they had any doubts before that He was worthy of worship, those doubts are gone now. The world did its worst and He is still victorious. What confidence that should give to us who follow Him!

Jesus gave the women one of the most common commands in Scripture: “Do not be afraid!” Next, He had a mission for them. They were to go and tell His *brothers* to go to Galilee. How significant that He would now call them brothers. The apostle Paul explains that those God foreknew He predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus, so that Jesus might be the first among many brothers (Romans 8:29). God is our Father, and Jesus is our Brother. We were adopted into the family of God through the blood of Christ that justified us. Try to fathom that!

Consider: If Jesus is your big Brother, what do you have to fear?

## 1/16 Mark 1:12

*12 The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.*

We begin again going through the life of Jesus, this time in the gospel of Mark. When Jesus began His ministry, He first went to John the Baptist to be baptized. John was preparing the way for the Messiah. When John saw Jesus coming, John declared Jesus to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. After baptizing Jesus, John saw the Spirit of God descend on Jesus and heard a voice from heaven that declared Jesus to be the beloved Son of God.

Our verse for today tells us what happened next. The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness. Jesus fasted and prayed for forty days. That time of communion with God was the foundation of Jesus’ ministry. The Spirit drove Him to a time of solitude to clarify His mission and hone His ability to listen to His Father. We would do well to allow the Spirit to drive us to a time of solitude before beginning a new ministry or direction.

Then the Devil came and tempted Him. This was also necessary and allowed by God. A new direction in ministry will often be challenged before it begins. It steels us for the task. It makes us certain of its importance. It prepares us for future trials. While Satan tempted Jesus with shortcuts to temporal success, Jesus listened to the Father and spoke His Word, the mighty sword of the Spirit.

Consider: God allows you to face temptations to strengthen your resolve. They exercise your ability to stand on the Word of God.

## 1/17 Mark 1:22

*22 And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.*

Jesus moved to the home of Peter in Capernaum. The synagogue was just down the street about a block. The foundation of that very synagogue is still visible today. When Jesus taught, the people noticed a difference. He was not quoting other rabbis or focusing on the oral laws. That was the way the scribes taught. Instead, Jesus would often make the statement, “You have heard it was said…, but I tell you . . .” (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 33-34). He spoke as one who had the authority to tell a person or a crowd what was actually true and what wasn’t.

The only rabbis that claimed to have the authority to do that were ones that had memorized the entire Old Testament and been approved as an authority by two other such rabbis. Jesus claimed a different type of approval. The miracles He did, the testimony of John the Baptist, and the witness of His heavenly Father were more than enough validation that He spoke the truth (John 5:33-36; 12:49). Adding to that, Jesus claimed He came down from heaven and could therefore speak of heavenly things (John 3:13; 8:23).

No one ever spoke like Jesus (John 7:46). When I listen to the gurus of this age, all I hear are words strung together that don’t really make sense. Jesus’ words are powerfully moving and He backed them up with actions that validated them. You can count on them to be completely true.

Consider: Some people base their faith on feeling. Others base their faith on their own personal feelings about what sounds right to them. There is only one source of truth you can be absolutely sure of—the words of the One who came down from heaven.

## 1/18 Mark 1:27

*27 And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”*

Jesus’ authority was not only in the way that He taught. Anyone can claim to define truth. Jesus’ authority was verified by His actions. A demon-possessed man confronted Jesus in the synagogue, calling Him the Holy One of God and asking if He had come to destroy them. Jesus ordered the demon to be silent and come out of the man. The man convulsed and then was free of the demon.

Exorcisms were done by some Jewish leaders, but only in a long process with certain prayers and sometimes special herbs. Jesus just commanded the unclean spirit to leave. Not only did the demon identify Jesus as the Holy One of God, but the instant obedience of the demon demonstrated that Jesus had authority over it. The people had never seen anything like that. It was so clearly evident of Jesus’ authority that the Jewish leaders excused it by saying Jesus was in league with the prince of the demons (Matthew 9:34).

The opponents of the Scriptures will sometimes claim Jesus was a prophet or a great teacher ahead of His time, but the record of what He did declares He is much more than that. No one has ever exercised such authority in teaching. Consider how the gospel of Jesus has changed the world. No one, except Jesus and the apostles He commissioned, has ever healed everyone who came to him or her or has consistently cast out demons with a one-sentence command. The demon knew what many today refuse to see. Jesus is the Holy One of God!

Consider: The physical and spiritual realms obey Jesus’ commands. What do those who belong to Him have to fear?

## 1/19 Mark 1:45

*45 But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.*

A leper came to Jesus and pleaded with Jesus to be made clean. The leper said that he knew that if Jesus was willing, Jesus could do it. Jesus touched him. People knew that touching a leper made a person unclean and that the person would require a cleansing ritual. But Jesus said, “I will; be clean.” The leper instantly showed no signs of leprosy. Jesus sternly charged the man, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.” (See Leviticus 13 if you’d like a detailed description of the treatments Moses described.) Jesus’ command tells us that Jesus observed the Laws of Moses and expected other Jews in His day to do so , as well.

The man went out and began to tell everyone about the miracle. You can hardly blame him. Who knows how long he had been isolated from people because of the affliction. Anyone would be so excited that it would be hard to keep it in. Yet, the consequences for Jesus were constant distractions and interruptions. Talking about good things is not always a good thing.

Perhaps you have had the experience of the Holy Spirit sternly charging you not to tell anyone about a certain thing. Did it burn inside you? Did you obey? We don’t always see or understand the consequences of disobedience. If there are times we should not speak of good things, how much more of evil done to us? The last member of our body to be tamed is the tongue (James 3:8). The more we practice obeying that still, small voice, the easier it becomes to stifle the desires of our old nature.

Remember: When you discern the Holy Spirit telling you not to speak of a matter, remember the consequences of disobedience can be much more than you would think.

## 1/20 Mark 2:14

*14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.*

This tells us of the calling of Matthew, also known as Levi. In recent years archeologists have discovered that Capernaum had a man-made harbor. The main road from Rome went right by the synagogue, Peter’s house, and the harbor. Matthew very well may have been collecting the tax on goods that went on and off the ships. Tax collectors often would pay the tax to Rome and then collect it plus some for themselves. They were disliked by their fellow Jews because of their service to the nation that subjugated them. The other disciples probably thought the choice of Matthew to be a strange one.

Scholars speculate that it was Matthew who wrote down the first record of Jesus’ sayings in Hebrew and that this was the resource for some of the sayings in the Gospels. If that is so, we owe a great deal to Matthew and can now see what a wise choice Jesus made. Matthew most likely made a very humble disciple.

If we are honest, we might confess that we wonder about some of God’s choices today. However, those who know they need a Savior and that they bring nothing to the table are often the humblest of God’s servants. They are quick to see the need in others. They often bring talents that have previously been latent because of their life of sin. Jesus is the great transformer of lives. He loves to take the worst ones and make them examples of the greatness of His grace. Matthew left his worldly wealth and the disdain of his fellow citizens and became a beloved name to believers around the world.

Consider: That homeless person, drug addict, or biker just might be the next great evangelist. They were made in the image of God. His grace can transform even the unethical, immoral, or prideful.

## 1/21 Mark 2:27-28

*27 And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”*

Jesus’ disciples had pulled some heads of grain, rubbed off the husks, and eaten the grain on the Sabbath. The Pharisees asked Jesus why He allowed them to violate the Sabbath. According to the Pharisees’ definition of work, the disciples were harvesting and winnowing the grain. How ridiculous! But being so picky was the Pharisees’ way of making sure one did not break God’s laws. Isn’t that a good thing?

Jesus’ answer pointed to Scripture. When David was fleeing from King Saul, he and his men ate the bread of God from the tabernacle (1 Samuel 21:1-6). The Law declared that it was only to be eaten by priests (Leviticus 24:9). God overlooked the disobedience because of the men’s hunger and desperate need. Besides that, God made the Sabbath for man. It was intended for man to rest and recover from his labor (Exodus 23:12). Jesus was getting at the spirit behind that particular law.

Then Jesus made a very bold statement. The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. “Son of Man” was Jesus’ most common term for Himself. He declared that He is Master of even the Sabbath. The only activity the Pharisees believed was allowable on the Sabbath was to worship in the nearby synagogue. The title “Son of Man” in Daniel is the title of the One whom all will serve (Daniel 7:13-14).

Consider: Most Christians worship on the day after the Sabbath. Jesus is our Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:9). Is He your Master as to how that day is spent?

## 1/22 Mark 3:5

*5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.*

The religious leaders were watching Jesus to see if there was something He would do that would violate their rules. They believed that their oral tradition was handed down to them from Moses and was as important as the laws God gave to Moses. Jesus must have had a reputation for not bowing to those oral traditions or they wouldn’t be watching for Him to break one of them. The real problem was these leaders’ jealousy of the crowd’s respect for Jesus.

There was a man in the synagogue that Sabbath day who had a withered hand. I wonder if he was planted there by the leaders or if he had come hoping to be healed. The news of Jesus’ gift of healing had already been spread abroad (Mark 1:45).

Jesus knew what was going on. There was no compassion among the leaders for this man who couldn’t earn a living because of his disability. They were only concerned with whether or not Jesus would heal a non life-threatening affliction on the Sabbath.

Jesus looked on these leaders with anger. They had given the crowds the impression that God was a heartless, demanding dictator. Jesus could have waited to avoid the confrontation, but He was not intimidated. He knew all things were in His Father’s hands. It was better to show the people the true heart of God than to give in to the pressure of these hypocritical leaders. They all witnessed the amazing restoration of the man’s hand. Imagine the wonder and praise of the people in the synagogue. But the religious leaders’ response was to go to the secular leaders to plot the destruction of Jesus.

Consider: Many who call themselves Christians think along the same line as those religious leaders. They give the world the wrong impression of the heart of God. How important it is that we show God’s compassionate heart so that the world might have a true impression of the loving God we serve! Don’t be intimidated. Show God’s love.

## 1/23 Mark 3:21

*21 And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.”*

The crowds had come once again to where Jesus was living in Peter’s home in Capernaum. They were hoping to be healed or to witness a miracle. Surely they wanted to hear more from this rabbi who was so different from all the others. But Jesus’ family thought that Jesus had lost His mind. He had lived with them all these years and never healed anyone or tried to teach a new doctrine. The sudden change alarmed them. His mother must have wondered if this change was what the angel who announced Jesus’ birth had predicted. And there were also the words of Simeon on the day they dedicated Jesus as a baby in the temple. Simeon had warned Mary that a sword would pierce her soul (Luke 2:35).

Jesus warned others that a man’s foes would be those in his own house (Matthew 10:36). He was experiencing it Himself. Familiarity often does breed contempt. How could His family understand unless the Spirit of God helped them see the truth? They probably wanted to take Him back to His carpentry shop to get Him away from the dangerous attention of the powers that ruled Galilee.

Familiarity with Jesus during His ministry bred reverence in the disciples, but it wouldn’t be until after the Resurrection that the family finally came to understand that their half-brother was the Son of God. How can anyone argue with rising from the dead? Jesus’ half-brother James even became the leader of the church.

If Jesus’ death and resurrection was what it took to win Jesus’ family, you can understand why you must be patient with your family. A consistent life of love and grace will show that you have been raised with Christ (Colossians 3:1).

Prayer: Lord, help me to be an example to my family of the new life I have in You. Help them see that You are the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

## 1/24 Mark 3:35

*35 “For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”*

Jesus’ physical family stood on the outskirts of the crowd that was sitting around Jesus as He taught, and someone thought Jesus should know. After all, shouldn’t one’s family be more important to someone than other people are? Jesus told the crowd that those listening were His family. Then He explained that his brother, sister, and mother are those who do the will of God. What was the will of God? God declared it on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). Listen to Jesus! His physical family was not listening. His spiritual family was listening.

There is a family of God. It does not reside in one denomination or in a particular church. It is international and multilingual. It consists of those who do the will of God by listening to Jesus. Their bond to one another is greater than that of flesh and blood. That bond comes from the sharing the same heart for God, His Word, and His Son. We share the same love for truth. We share God’s heart for the world. We have the same expectation of Jesus’ return.

Wherever I have gone over the wide earth, I have found brothers, sisters, and mothers. I can see it in their smile. Sometimes when I can’t communicate with words I will whistle a well-known hymn or praise chorus and watch their faces light up. If either of us has a need, we will gladly help our spiritual family member. Our hearts are one in Christ Jesus. Heaven is filled with family waiting for those who do the will of God to be home to be with them. Now and forever we have but one focus, Jesus!

Consider: Are you a part of the family of God?

## 1/25 Mark 4:24-25

*24 And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. 25 For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”*

Jesus was sharing parables with a crowd when He inserted this important point. He was warning them to listen with their whole hearts. That would be a large degree or measure of listening.

The scale on which you listen to Jesus and apply what He teaches is the amount that you will get out of it. If your mind goes wandering off, you are probably not really listening at all. You won’t get anything out of it. If you wholeheartedly listen and apply it to yourself, you will get even more than what is on the surface.

When I preach a sermon, I observe the faces of the congregation. I see some not using any measure, others using a small measure, and some are using the largest measure they can find. When I talk to the congregation after the message, it always surprises me that some got even more than I shared. Still more was added to them because they took the large measure with which to hear. Others are talking about the afternoon football game. They had a nice nap. The little that they caught of the message was soon forgotten.

This applies to reading Scripture, too. Whenever we approach God’s Word, whether in a sermon, Bible study, or devotions, we should expect to hear what God would say to us. A “big measure” is seen in our excited anticipation of hearing God’s instruction for our life. Those with this attitude are the ones who go away with even more than what the teacher taught that day.

Consider: With what measure am I reading these devotions?

## 1/26 Mark 5:28

*28 For she said, “If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.”*

While Jesus was on His way to heal the ruler of the synagogue’s daughter, a woman tried to sneak up to Jesus in the crowd and touch the tassel of His clothes (Matthew 9:20). She had had a discharge of blood for many years. According to the Laws of Moses, that made her unclean (Leviticus 15:25). She should have been declaring out loud that she was unclean so that others would not touch her and thereby be defiled, but she was desperate. She had spent all her wealth on physicians who did nothing for her (Mark 5:26).

The Jews had a custom of making the strings at the end of their clothes come together to form a tassel. It was tied in five knots to remember the five books of Moses. There was an old saying that taught that the tassel of the Messiah would have healing powers. That is why Jesus accused the Pharisees of being prideful for wearing long tassels (Matthew 23:5).

This woman was convinced that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. She had the faith that if she touched His tassel she would finally be healed, and she was! Jesus discerned that power had gone out from Him (Mark 5:30). Certainly others in the crowd had bumped up against Him, but this woman did so with the faith that He was the Messiah and that she would be healed. Jesus did not rebuke her for breaking the Law. He knew how desperate she had been. He told her to go in peace, for her faith had made her well (Mark 5:34). Jesus is teaching us that an essential part of prayer is the faith to believe that He is our Savior and does have the power to answer our prayers. By faith we reach out and touch Him or come near that He may touch us, and the power flows out from Him.

Prayer: Lord, increase our faith!

## 1/27 Mark 6:4

*4 And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.”*

Jesus returned to His hometown of Nazareth. Familiarity often breeds contempt not only with one’s family but with one’s community. We must understand that the community of Nazareth was populated with descendants of King David from whom the Messiah was to come. When Jesus first began to apply messianic passages to Himself, the town was excited (Luke 4:22). They thought their hour had come. They imagined they would all be a part of the royal family, or at least honored above all others. But then Jesus ended the sermon by saying He was going to the Gentiles. They were so furious they wanted to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:29).

Put yourself in their sandals. Now that they have had time to hear of His ministry and gifts, He has returned. Yet, they still do not see Him as the Messiah. Imagine a child you grew up with making such a claim. Sure, he might have been a kind and gentle child but how could *he* be a prophet? Their unbelief had the opposite effect of the belief of the woman who had a bleeding issue (See yesterday’s devotion). Instead of drawing the power of God, their unbelief repelled that power. It kept Jesus from helping them the way He had helped others in many towns. Jesus marveled at their unbelief (Mark 6:6).

People may reject us for a similar reason. Sometimes we may even reject someone’s teaching because we think we know the person’s weaknesses too well. The Spirit of God can speak through people you would never expect. He even spoke through the high priest who was going to have Jesus crucified (John 11:51). Our responsibility is to be open to hear what God would say to us regardless of who brings it to us. In Jesus’ case, the reason His acquaintances had to reject him was their own pride.

Prayer: Lord, please help me to never reject Your message because of my pride or the stubbornness of my heart. Help me welcome the truth, even when it hurts.

## 1/28 Mark 6:8

*8 He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts . . .*

Jesus was training His disciples to carry on after His ascension. He sent out the twelve in pairs. He gave them authority to heal and cast out demons. They would be announcing to people that the kingdom of God was at hand (Matthew 10:7). Though the disciples did not know it yet, the Kingdom would come on the Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus gave the disciples some strange instructions. They weren’t to take any money or a change of clothes and they were to stay with anyone who would invite them into their homes. In another gospel, Jesus explained that the laborer was worthy of his wages (Luke 10:7). They were to eat whatever their host provided.

Why would Jesus ask them to do this? I believe it was because it involved others in working for the Kingdom. Not only would those individuals who helped the disciples hear more about Jesus and His teaching, but by helping the disciples they would be laying up treasure in heaven. Jesus was looking out for the eternal good of those who received the disciples and at the same time teaching the disciples to live by faith. They had to trust God for their every need and expect God to supply it through those who were receptive to the gospel.

Consider: Whether we are those who are sent or those who are assisting them, God is concerned about our eternal good. His desire is for us to store up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20)

## 1/29 Mark 6:37

*37 But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?”*

Jesus had tried to get away from the crowds to get some rest, but they could see where Jesus’ boat was going and followed from along the shoreline. There were five thousand men plus women and children. Jesus taught them all day. As evening approached, the disciples suggested that Jesus send the crowd away so that they could get something to eat. Jesus responded, “You give them something to eat.” Jesus had shortly before sent the disciples out in twos as a part of their training. Now He is telling them to consider what they should do in a case like this.

Their solution is probably the same one that you or I would have come up with: Send a team and a cart to go buy a whole bunch of bread and haul it back. We look to ourselves and our capabilities and consider our limitations. But what does God want to do in this situation?

Jesus asked the disciples the same thing that God asked of Moses when He asked what he had on hand (Exodus 4:2). Moses just had a staff, but look what God did with that staff! Jesus’ disciples just had two fish and five small loaves of bread. Look what God did with that! Jesus was still teaching them to have faith and look to God. God may direct you to do the practical, or He may direct you to give what you have on hand to be used by Him in a supernatural way.

We often look to a pastor or elder to address the present needs. It may be someone who is in need of prayer, or who has a financial emergency or a crisis of faith. Can you hear Jesus stretching your faith by telling you to pray for the person or with His help to meet that need yourself? Before you run to someone else, will you pray and ask God what He would have you do?

Consider: Jesus is training you just as He trained His disciples.

## 1/30 Mark 7:15

*15 “There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.”*

The Jews believed that evil could enter into a person through the mouth. They were fearful of eating off a plate or drinking from a vessel that had been touched by a Gentile. Dishes purchased from a foreigner would be carefully washed, or if possible, taken through a fire. They ritually washed their hands before eating. They also believed non-kosher foods would make a person unclean. While these are good dietary and hygienic practices, evil has another origin.

Jesus explained that sin comes from within one’s own heart. It was against the laws of Moses to eat non-kosher food (Leviticus 11), but eating it in spite of God’s command is not the issue, for following God’s Law begins in the heart. Those food laws were for the health of the nation, but for a Jew to eat one bite of pork or crab would not make the person unclean. Rebellion starts in the heart.

We are quick to point outside ourselves to place blame on something or someone else for our own actions. Eve blamed the serpent. Adam blamed Eve and ultimately God (Genesis 3:12). Jesus is telling us that when we sin we should look within. There is a desire in our own hearts that is ungodly. We have not yet taken that desire to the cross. We can point at a multitude of things to justify our actions, but Jesus has told us the real source. Quit placing blame on circumstances and people and look at your heart.

Prayer: Lord, help me to stop placing blame and to deal with the sin in my own heart. Help me identify the sin and understand why I have fallen for a lie. Help me take the wrong desire to the cross.

## 1/31 Mark 8:2

*2 “I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat.”*

Jesus had been in Gentile areas, perhaps to avoid the large Jewish crowds. While He was near Tyre, we only read of one woman’s daughter being healed. Jesus needed time to teach His disciples, as He was in the last year of His ministry. He returned to Galilee via the Decapolis region. The area was mostly inhabited by Greeks. Apparently, the man from whom the legion of demons had been cast out had done a good job sharing what Jesus had done for him (Mark 5:19). The crowd that gathered around Jesus numbered four thousand.

Jesus had performed healings and taught for three days. He told the disciples that many of those people had come from far away and Jesus was concerned that they needed the strength from food to be able to return to their homes. Jesus shows us the compassionate heart of God, who is concerned even for our daily sustenance. His disciples said there was not enough food there to feed all these people. They didn’t learn the lesson from when Jesus had fed a much larger crowd. Their solution was the same as before.

If we don’t learn a lesson the first time we are taught, God is faithful to repeat the lesson. Seven loaves of bread and a few small fish were more than enough. What God has provided is always enough for what He calls us to do. Don’t think you lack the skills or finances to obey what God has called you to do. If He hasn’t already provided, He will, and if you don’t see it coming in, He’ll multiply what you have.

Remember: If God is repeating a lesson in your life, it is either because you didn’t learn it the first time, or because you need that lesson reinforced.

## 2/1 Mark 8:15

*15 And he cautioned them, saying, “Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”*

The Jewish people referred to leaven as a picture of sin. It was an illustration of pride. Sins such as gossip, slander, anger, or false teaching spread from person to person, similar to the way a once small quantity of dough spreads into a large lump that can overflow the bowl as the leavening takes effect. Those sins often cause us to put ourselves above others in our own estimation. That is pride. Jesus told His disciples to watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.

The disciples were thinking Jesus was somehow referring to the fact that they had only brought one loaf of bread with them. However, Jesus was speaking of the two different sins, each of which resulted in pride that was spiritually disabling. The leaven of the Pharisees referred to exalting themselves above others because they lived strict lives of discipline in an attempt to follow all the Laws of Moses and everything written about those laws. They didn’t want common people to touch them because they considered themselves so holy. The leaven of Herod and those Jews who backed him, the Herodians, was that of compromise with the world. They wanted the power of being the rulers and the freedom to worship Greek gods when they were with the Greeks. Their pride was in thinking they were above others and could compromise the Law of Moses because they were in power.

These two factions were polar opposites, and yet the seduction of thinking oneself more important than others made them similar. Each group expected respect and honor from man. Jesus was warning the disciples of this dangerous temptation. Just because they were following the Messiah did not make them more valuable to God than any person they met. Jesus was warning them not to be prideful that God had chosen them to be apostles, but to relate to everyone as a fellow human created in the image of God.

Consider: We must watch out for the leaven of self-exaltation. If we have more to share spiritually or physically, it is only because of the grace of God. The homeless person on the street, the senator from our district, or the pastor in our church are each made in the image of God. Every fallen person is only saved by the grace of the Savior. God loves each of them and we should, too.

## 2/2 Mark 8:38

*38 “For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*

Jesus has made it clear that He is not of this world (John 8:23). He is the Word of God incarnate (John 1:14). He only speaks what the Father directs Him to say (John 14:10). To be ashamed of Him and of His words would mean that one is ashamed of his or her Creator. To be ashamed of Him is to be ashamed of goodness, righteousness, and truth.

The whole world lies in the power of the Evil One (1John 5:19). To love the world is to love lust and pride (1 John 2:16). Fueled by lust and pride, we often try to fit in with the world and its patterns so the world will not reject us. The Christian who embraces Jesus and His words will inevitably be at odds with this world. By the very way Christians live they condemn the ungodly. I’ve witnessed godly people accused of being judgmental simply because they lived in a way that didn’t conform to the desires of the world.

As a culture grows darker, it becomes increasingly threatened if anyone even mentions the name of Jesus. Quoting the Word of God is looked upon as backward—yet it is what the true believer loves. Jesus will return. He knows even now if our heart is divided. We either love worldliness or we love Him. We are either ashamed of Him or He is everything to us. There comes a point in our walk with the Lord when we must decide which it will be.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be wholeheartedly Yours alone (Psalm 86:11).

## 2/3 Mark 9:37

*37 “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”*

The disciples were arguing about which of them would hold the highest position when Jesus set up His kingdom. Jesus told them that they had things upside down. The greatest was the servant. Jesus’ life exemplified that truth. To drive the point home, Jesus set a child in their midst. He then spoke the words in our verse for today.

What was Jesus telling them? If you recall the other account of the parents bringing their children to Jesus, you’ll remember that the disciples tried to turn them away (Mark 10:14). Children were not so important in the world of the first century. An important person couldn’t be bothered with children. But Jesus was showing the disciples that their idea of greatness was not God’s idea of greatness. Influencing these little lives with the love of God was a great act. To love a child whom God made in His own image is to love God. To receive a child is to receive Jesus and the Father. A godly person loves children and welcomes time with them.

This teaching was so shocking to the disciples that they remembered it and had Mark record it for all future followers of Jesus. Don’t be confused by the world’s idea of greatness. A great person does not bark out orders and expect to be served. Rather a great one loves individuals and see the potential in them. Great people know that Jesus died for them, which makes them priceless. They care about the least. That is true greatness.

Prayer: Lord, please bless every caregiver and every teacher who shows the love of God to these You made in Your image. Help us to see how You value us all.

## 2/4 Mark 9:43

*43 “And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.*”

A popular effort today emphasizes that Jesus’ focus was love and therefore they downplay any mention of hell. It’s cafeteria-style Christianity: “I’ll have a little of wisdom and a large helping of love but none of that judgment, thank you.” If we are going to use the Word of God as a source, then we need to accept all that it teaches. Jesus spoke more about hell than He did about heaven. He came for the very purpose of saving us from hell. He suffered and died in our place that we might have a just way to escape from the condemnation we deserve that would destine us for hell.

In our passage for today, Jesus is telling us to become radical in our dealing with sin in our lives. He does not want us to literally cut off our hands, but He is telling us how urgently we need to forcefully deal with sin in our lives. You must remove whatever tempts you. You must deal with whatever enables you to continue in a particular sin. Is the computer giving you access to porn? Download a filter or give the computer away. Does your route home take you by that bar where you drink too much? Change your route home. Does the TV consume your valuable time and keep you from the Word? Call and cancel paid programming or give away your TV.

How you will spend eternity is the most serious of matters. Whatever keeps you from a full commitment to Christ can eventually destroy your life unless you deal with it. Jesus was urgent and extreme in His call for us to take action against sin in our lives. That is because of His great love for us. We may think we are in Jesus, but our actions show where our hearts truly reside. If you really love the Lord, you will hate evil (Psalm 97:10).

Consider: Is there habitual sin in my life that needs to be dealt a death blow?

## 2/5 Mark 11:10

*10 “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”*

The disciples followed Jesus into Jerusalem with amazement and fear (Mark 10:32). Jesus told them again that He would be delivered to the priests, condemned, mocked, spit upon, flogged, and killed, but rise on the third day (Mark 10:33-34). As Jesus entered the city, the crowds that heard of Lazarus’ resurrection enthusiastically greeted Jesus (John 17:17-18). They began to shout words from a psalm that they sang during the feasts. It was one with messianic portent.

Hosanna means “save us.” In the psalm, “Hosanna” is a cry to YHWH, the eternal God of Israel (Psalm 118:25). Saving us is exactly what Jesus had come to do. But our verse for today tells us what kind of salvation they were seeking. They referred to a prophecy from Ezekiel written many years after King David. It predicted a descendant of David restoring their inheritance of the land promised to Israel and reigning eternally as a shepherd king (Ezekiel 37:24-25). They thought it was time for the earthly kingdom. They did not recognize the need for the salvation of their souls. They had the right words but the wrong interpretation. Jesus was first establishing a spiritual kingdom.

Is it possible that we do the same thing today? We often look at the promises of Scripture and apply them in a purely physical way. We want God to heal us of every disease, when God wants to heal our souls. We can desire physical prosperity, when God wants to give us spiritual prosperity that is eternal. We want a relationship with a person to be everything we hope, when God wants us to find fulfillment in relationship with Him.

Consider: Is the spiritual dimension of your life a greater priority than your physical desires?

## 2/6 Mark 11:25

*25 “And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”*

On several different occasions, Jesus declared that we should forgive those who have offended us if we want God to forgive us (Matthew 6:14). Every sin offends God. We must realize that it is difficult for a human to go through a single day without offending God. That means we need the forgiveness of God or we will face eternal judgment (Matthew 18:35). To offend a fellow human is to offend someone made in the image of God. But Jesus is speaking to the one who is offended. That person must forgive whether the offender seeks forgiveness or not.

You might ask why that is necessary. Think how minor an infraction it is for a human to offend a human as compared to a human offending his or her Creator, God. If our hearts are hardened toward the one who offended us, why should God not harden His heart toward us? We should forgive because we realize we are just as capable of offending someone and we need forgiveness. We have been and will be just as guilty as the one we forgive.

God is seeking our best interest. Forgiving frees us from our own poisonous thoughts. The one who offended us is not playing the offense over and over in his or her mind. Yet we do so to our own detriment. The poison of bitterness affects our thoughts and attitudes. When we begin to pray, those thoughts come to mind. Jesus says that moment is the time to forgive them. You are coming before God from Whom you need forgiveness. Begin your prayer time by forgiving anyone who has offended you.

Consider: Christians follow the example of their Savior, who forgave those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34).

## 2/7 Mark 13:2

*2 And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”*

Jesus was teaching in the temple during the week that He would be arrested. As they left the temple, the disciples were marveling at the stones from which it was made. The temple was an architectural wonder. Enormous cut stones made up its foundation, some of which can still be seen in the Rabbi’s Tunnel. The upper structure on the southern end was sometimes referred to as the forest of columns, or the Royal Stoa. It was a colonnade with a roof above. Its marble columns, four across and forty in length, were so huge it would take three men to reach around the circumference of one. Josephus wrote that this structure was "more worthy of mention than any other under the sun."

When Jesus said it will all be thrown down, the disciples must have been shocked. Yet Jesus was much more than a prophet. His prophecy would come to pass in AD 70.

In a way, we could say that any structure in the world will eventually be thrown down. Kingdoms rise and fall. Humans are violent in taking what belongs to others. Our houses grow old and someone tears them down to make way for something new. To walk through the rubble of a mound in Israel and see the layers of one period of occupation after another is instructive. How temporal are the works of human hands! We can be certain they will all be thrown down.

Later in the same week, Jesus would do something with His hands that would ring throughout eternity. In a great act of love, He would lie down upon a wooden cross and allow his hands to be nailed to it. That cross would be the altar upon which He would die for the sins of the world. Now our hands and feet can do something eternal. We can take His gospel and the love He puts in our hearts to the ends of the earth and be a part of building an eternal kingdom.

Consider: What are you doing that will make a difference in eternity?

## 2/8 Mark 13:26-27

*26 “And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.*

God came in a cloud to meet with Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16). God came in a cloud upon the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). Jesus will come in a cloud with power and glory to gather the remaining believers from the ends of the earth. I understand this to be after the Rapture. The elect are the Messianic Jews that are witnessing throughout the earth and those who turned to Christ during the tribulation.

John the Beloved tells us that every eye will see Him (Revelation 1:7). Whether that is from televised news or in supernatural ways, we cannot say. We do know it will not be a joyful time for the earth. In a parallel passage Jesus says that all the tribes of the earth will mourn (Matthew 24:30). They will realize there is justice and that all will be held accountable for their actions. Lies must cease, as truth will be plain for all to see.

Jesus will reign, sitting on His glorious throne (Matthew 25:31). I believe that throne is the Ark of the Covenant. Mankind will have a thousand years to experience how the earth should have been governed. There will still be free will, and many will choose at the end of that period of time to rebel against Jesus. It’s hard to fathom how anyone could be so hard-hearted, but then we only have to look at history to see it is inevitable. The final judgment will then take place.

Consider: Every one of us today is on one side or the other. Even the sight of the glorified Christ and the experience of His reign will not soften the hearts of many.

## 2/9 Mark 14:22

*22 And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.”*

Jesus and His disciples were celebrating the traditional Passover Seder. The atmosphere had turned ominous after Jesus had predicted the coming betrayal and Judas had left. The meal recalled the deliverance of Israel from Egypt that God wrought through His servant Moses. A Passover lamb was slain by each family or group to remember that the angel of death had passed over the homes marked with the blood of the lamb.

Suddenly, the symbolism changed from one deliverance to another. When Jesus said the unleavened bread He was breaking was His body, a whole new meaning was given to the Seder meal. Now we call it *Communion*. We take the broken bread that represents the body of Jesus broken for us to remind us that the angel of death cannot claim our souls for judgment. We are delivered from the bondage of the law of sin and death (Acts 13:39; Romans 8:2). That is a much greater deliverance than from physical taskmasters.

Just as the body of the lamb was broken and the blood marked the doorposts of each home, so Jesus was broken so the doorposts of our hearts might be marked with His saving blood. Just as the lamb was consumed by each family, so our families need to partake of Jesus, the Word made flesh (John 1:14). Even today the Jews celebrate the Seder meal with three pieces of unleavened bread. The middle one is broken, but they know not why. Of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, only the middle One was broken that we might know life.

Remember: Jesus gives the broken bread to you and says, “Take; this is my body.” When you read and meditate on the Word and let the Spirit apply it to your life, you are partaking of Christ.

## 2/10 Mark 14:27

*27 And Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’”*

Jesus knew this Scripture applied to Him. If it was written, then it would come to pass. He had complete trust in the Word of God. It was surer than the sun rising in the morning. Jesus is the Great Shepherd and we are the sheep of His pasture (Psalm 100:3). He would be stricken, and His disciples would forsake Him for a time.

The chapter from which Jesus quoted, Zechariah 13, reads like an end-time passage, and I believe that is what it is. But Jesus discerned by the Holy Spirit that this particular verse would have an intermediate fulfillment that week. The Word of God can speak to us by the power of the Holy Spirit. A phrase can jump out of a text and address our situation. That is especially true when we saturate our minds with the Word.

This comment from Jesus to the disciples did not change what they would do. It did tell them that Jesus knew in advance what was coming. He was assuring them that things had to play out in this way. It would look like everything was out of control and even appear as if God was defeated. But the events were going according to God’s plan.

There are times in our lives when we will hear a warning from God. We may discern what appears to be defeat coming like an unstoppable tidal wave. The advance warning of the Lord is to assure us that all is in His hands. The only thing that is really unstoppable is the ultimate will of God. His will is your sanctification and transformation into the image of His Son (1Thessalonians 4:3; Romans 8:29). Stand firm, don’t fear, be silent, and watch what God does in the end (Exodus 14:13-14).

Remember: In the final analysis, all things work together for the good of those whom God has chosen (Romans 8:28). Hold on and trust the One who has all power.

## 2/11 Mark 14:45

*45 And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, “Rabbi!” And he kissed him.*

Betrayed with a kiss! That was the sign to the soldiers pointing out whom to arrest. It was customary to kiss a close friend as a greeting. Judas had probably kissed Jesus upon greeting Him many times before. This time was quite different. He had led a group of six hundred soldiers along with chief priests and elders out of the Beautiful Gate, across the Kidron Valley, and up to Gethsemane (John 18:3). Jesus could have watched the whole procession lit by their torches from His vantage point in the olive grove.

Jesus knew exactly why He had come. This is what He had warned the disciples about on a number of occasions. The kiss was preceded by the greeting, “Rabbi!” That meant “teacher.” But Judas had not learned from the Teacher that God’s way up is down. He had not learned that he couldn’t force God’s hand. He had not learned that hypocrisy is for fools. He had not learned the greatest commands: To love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. He had heard them many times, but none of what he heard made it from his ears down to his heart.

We must ask ourselves if we have taken to heart what we have heard. We may know the words, but do our lives show that we have taken those words to heart? (Isaiah 29:13) We may call Jesus our teacher and kiss Him with our words when among Christians, but do our lives betray Him? I know a little of the deep sadness that comes with this kind of betrayal. I can almost see the grief in Jesus’ eyes as He says, “Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” (Luke 22:48)

Prayer: Lord, deliver me from hypocrisy and help me to live the words I have received!

## 2/12 Mark 15:4-5

*4 And Pilate again asked him, “Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.” 5 But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.*

Pilate was the Roman provincial governor and the only one who could order an execution. He had seen many cases and knew the way people acted under threat of crucifixion. The chief priests were piling on the accusations to try to get a death sentence. Defendants would say or do anything to escape such a fate. After each accusation Pilate would look to Jesus for His response, but there was none.

Pilate was amazed. How could anyone go quietly to such a horrific end? Even if some of the accusations were true, surely a person would want to qualify them in hopes of a reprieve. Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy from Isaiah 53:7b, “and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”

Jesus knew why He had come. He was the Lamb of God that was about to be slain for the sins of the world. He would take the wrath of God for every sin so that we might have life. His silence was the Lion of Judah’s deafening roar declaring He was submitted to the will of the Father for the salvation of humankind. It shouts, “I love you!” to all who have ears to hear.

Consider: Jesus’ example of complete trust in the Father and willingness to do His will gives us an example to follow when we are accused. Instead of squirming and trying to argue, we can look to our heavenly Father for our defense. The greatest defense ever given was the Resurrection. That will be ours, as well. It will declare to all creation that we have trusted Jesus to save our eternal souls.

## 2/13 Mark 15:15

*15 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.*

Pilate had a tradition of releasing one prisoner of the people’s choosing at Passover. He thought he could get out of this dilemma of having to order the death of someone who was a stick in the eye of the priests by offering to release Jesus. After all, it was only a few days earlier that they crowds had welcomed Him as Savior. But the priests had already urged the people to ask for Barabbas. The name means “son of the Father.” How ironic that Jesus was delivered up for one with such a name! Barabbas was an insurrectionist and murderer (Luke 23:25). The crowd had the opportunity to choose between the healing teacher who promoted a change of the heart and a man who wanted to use physical force to overthrow the Romans. They chose the latter.

How often do we face the same decision? We can forgive our enemies or we can try to get even. We can love that family member who insults us or we can shun him or her. It is a choice between God’s way or our way. Our options are the flesh or the Spirit. The choice we make testifies to the condition of our hearts.

The choice that day in Jerusalem to ask for Barabbas ended four decades later in the overthrow of the entire Jewish worship system. Their glorious temple was leveled. The Jews were even banned from entering Jerusalem. But what is much worse, they had rejected the One who could lead them to what they claimed they desired. They claimed to want to understand the Scriptures. With the rejection of Jesus that opportunity was gone for the majority of the Jews for millennia (John 5:39).

Consider: Nearly every day we are faced with a choices between the flesh and the Spirit, the temporal or the eternal, God’s way or man’s. Choose wisely! The consequences of your choices can affect your entire life and that of others, as well.

## 2/14 Mark 15:43

*43 Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.*

The religious council of Israel consisted of seventy men and the chief priest. They were the ones who had Jesus arrested and judged Him. These were the most respected men in Israel. Only the chief priest had a higher office. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were the only members we know of in the council who placed their faith in Jesus (John 19:39).

Our verse today tells us that Joseph took courage and went to Pilate to ask for the body. We may be inclined to think it was frightening to talk with Pilate, but I don’t think that is what is being addressed. Joseph and Nicodemus were defying the entire council. The act of Joseph taking the body of Jesus down from the cross and burying Jesus in Joseph’s own tomb was declaring himself a follower of Jesus. He would lose his position and authority and be blacklisted by Jerusalem’s elite. He was casting his lot with the fishermen and a former tax-collector who were hiding behind a locked door. He would even be giving up participation in the Feast of Unleavened Bread because he was going to touch Jesus’ dead body (Numbers 9:6).

Believe it or not, the same thing happens today. There are Muslims and Jews and Hindus and Buddhists who find their family and community reject them when they come to know Jesus as their Savior. Their businesses are boycotted and all interaction with them ceases. But like Joseph and Nicodemus, the reproach of Christ is worth more than anything in this world. It is a painful decision, but once you meet Jesus, you must make a choice.

Consider: We may not have such life-altering consequences from our decision to follow Jesus, but life will change. Friends will leave. Relations with family members will forever be altered. May we find the same courage that Joseph found to take that stand of identifying ourselves as Christ-followers.

## 2/15 Mark 16:9

*9 Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons.*

If you were going to make up a story about a religious hero who rose from the dead, wouldn’t it be more believable to have him appear to his lead disciple who was waiting at the grave because he had such faith in his leader? That is about the opposite of what happened on that Resurrection morning. The disciples were hiding behind locked doors. Jesus appeared to a woman of questionable past.

When she and others told the disciples that Jesus had risen, they did not believe her (Mark 16:11). That must have been difficult for the disciples to include in their record of events, but like all their other failures, they had to write the truth. Eyewitnesses of the events were still living when they wrote. And thank God they did include their failures.

Jesus had once said that the one who is forgiven of much loves much (Luke 7:47). It was the love of Jesus that first drew Mary Magdalene to Him. Your past is past in His eyes. Now it is about the depth of your love for Him. And even though the disciples doubted the promise of resurrection had come to pass, they loved Jesus. Love drew Jesus to appear to them, too. Isn’t it great to know that though Jesus will rebuke our doubts (Mark 16:14), He is still drawn to our love for Him? Some doubted what they were seeing even at one of the appearances of Jesus, and yet He commissioned them to spread the gospel around the world (Matthew 28:17-20).

Consider: Praise God! In Christ our past is forgotten, our present is forgiven, and love reigns supreme (1Corinthians 13:13).

## 2/16 Mark 16:15

***1****5 And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.*

The gospel of Matthew presents the Great Commission as going into the world to make disciples of all nations. That is different from Mark’s version of simply proclaiming the good news to all creation. Whenever we see what appear to be differences, we should first search for their compatibility. Because of the great deal of common material, we can assume three of the Gospel writers saw the first one that was written and decided to fill in any missing components they thought were important. Many scholars believe that Mark’s gospel was the first to be written, possibly drawing from now lost Hebrew sayings of Jesus written by Matthew. If that was the case, then Matthew saw the need to add to what Mark wrote concerning the preaching of the gospel, the necessity of making disciples and baptizing them.

It is not enough simply to proclaim the good news. Once the new believer receives the good news, someone must teach him the disciplines and lifestyle of a believer and the way to live his new life out in everyday life. The world is continually bombarding us with its temptations and alternatives that promise happiness. The babes in Christ need someone to teach them to walk in the Spirit.

Some believers are gifted at proclaiming the gospel. They would prefer Mark’s Great Commission. Other Christians are gifted to disciple the new believers so that they can stand firm in the Lord. They might prefer Matthew’s Great Commission. Both are essential, and they should work hand in hand rather than competing with the one another. Which has God gifted you to do?

Consider: One sows, another waters, but God gives the increase (1Corinthians 3:6).

## 2/17 Luke 1:1-2

*1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us . . .*

Luke begins his gospel by telling the recipient that many people had attempted to compile a narrative of what had taken place. He is referring to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the beginnings of the church. He declared that he and the others compiled their records from the accounts of eyewitnesses. The best way to get at the facts is to ask those who were present exactly what they witnessed. This tells us that Luke wrote while the original followers of Jesus were still living. That means other witnesses could read the work and refute it if it were not true. If he had made up or exaggerated the gospel according to Luke, those witnesses would have said so and the church would never have taken hold. We can be sure that Luke wrote early in the history of the church because he wrote his following account, the Acts of the Apostles, before the death of the apostle Paul.

Scholars know the timing of the writing of the Gospel is an important fact in determining the validity of what was written. For example, someone writing today about a person who died a hundred years ago would only be credible if he or she used the written testimony of those who knew the person. The Learning Channel produced a documentary on the debate surrounding the timing of the writing of the Gospels. Liberal professors like to date the timing as after AD 70 because they assume that there is no such thing as miracles or prophecy. They argue that the Gospels contain Jesus’ prediction that the temple would be destroyed, they must have been written after the fact to make Him appear to be a prophet.

The conclusion of the documentary is that too much evidence exists which contradicts the liberal view. Not only does the style of writing in some fragments suggest a date in the AD 50s but the fact that the earliest fragments were from scrolls and not book form shows us that the conservative scholars were correct in dating them to the AD 50s and early 60s. The reason the documentary is called The Eyewitnesses is because the Gospels were written while those witnesses were still living, just as Luke wrote in his introduction. Those witnesses could confirm or deny the validity of what was written. The record of the amazing life and ministry of Jesus as well as of His death and resurrection are historical facts!

Consider: The reason many so strongly resist this truth is that the life of Jesus is evidence of Creator God’s demand that all must repent and believe to be assured of heaven. The gospel declares that while we are free to decide how we live, God will hold us accountable. That is the message the liberal scholars refuse to accept in spite of the evidence. Will you accept that message? How should this truth change your life?

## 2/18 Luke 1:32-33

*32 “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”*

These are the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary describing the Son that would be conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb. The long chain of promises about a coming Savior goes all the way back to Eve: The seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). The seed of Abraham would bless the world (Genesis 22:18). Then the promise went down his lineage to Isaac and then to his son, Jacob. The promise seemed to fade for generations until King David. Then the promise was renewed with more details. This coming King of David’s lineage would reign forever (Acts 2:30). The prophets confirmed that this would surely come to pass, but added that this One would be called Mighty God and Everlasting Father (Isaiah 9:6-7)!

The promised Messiah was a very earnest hope in the time when Gabriel made the announcement. Women would pray to be the mother of the One that was to come. Mary would have understood the words of Gabriel to mean that she was to be the mother of this special child. She and her betrothed were both of the house of David. Just exactly how the promise would come to pass was a mystery. Few understood that the Messiah would be a deliverer from sin and that the deliverance from earthly oppression would come much later (Zechariah 3:9).

When Jesus was crucified, we wonder what Mary thought of the promise then. At the Resurrection she must have thought it was surely the time to set up His earthly kingdom? And we, too, wonder how long it will be before the earthly kingdom is established and sin is no more. Those in Christ have entered the kingdom, for He reigns in our hearts. Yet, we long for His earthly reign, when injustice will cease and all will know Him.

Prayer: Come, Lord Jesus! Cause all oppression to cease. Reign in righteousness over all the earth. Reign in my heart today.

## 2/19 Luke 1:76

*76 “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways”*

The priest Zechariah had been struck speechless because he doubted the angel’s proclamation (Luke 1:20). He questioned the possibility of his wife having a child at her age. Surely he knew the story of Abraham and Sarah, but when an angel prophesies that it will happen to you, it’s another matter. When the child was born, Zechariah’s voice returned and he uttered a prophecy that included our verse for today.

Zechariah’s prophecy declared that his child, John, would be the fulfillment of the prophecies of Malachi (see 3:1) and Isaiah (see 40:3). He would prepare the way for the coming Messiah by calling people to repentance so that they might receive the Messiah (Luke 1:77-79). This one who was to prepare the way was widely recognized as the return of Elijah, the prophet (Mark 9:11). What the religious leaders and scholars seemed to miss was that the One for whom the way is prepared is the *Lord*, the eternal God of Israel.

Just as workers would go before a king or emissary and repair the road that he was to travel, so John was to prepare the way into every heart by calling them to humility and repentance so that the road into their heart would be prepared for the Messiah’s words. That is the same work of the Spirit of God today in every heart. Some will hear the call and, like the Jews in John’s day, they will come to a spiritual Jordan River to publicly express their need to be washed of the sins of their past. They are then ready to receive the words of Jesus (John 5:24). John was a prophet of the Most High God preparing the way for the Lord, who is one with the Most High, so that hearts would be ready to hear.

Consider: Has the Spirit of the Lord been working on the highway into your heart? Are you ready to hear and receive the words of Jesus? And who will you meet today that God may speak to in the same manner that He spoke through John?

## 2/20 Luke 2:11

*11 “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*

The angelic messenger spoke these words to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem. (See April 27 evening in *Through the Bible Daily Devotions*) These shepherds may have been tending sheep that were raised specifically for sacrifice in the temple in neighboring Jerusalem. The angel may have been telling them that they would need to find a new job. Unto you is born The Lamb of God!

“In the city of David” points to the promise of a Messiah from the line of David. He is a Savior, but He had not come to deliver us from the oppression of man. He came to deliver us from the enslavement of sin and impending judgment. He is Christ, that is to say, the Messiah, the Anointed One. And He is Lord! Not just a ruler but *the* Ruler. He is the One for Whom all things exist. This one sentence from the angel tells us exactly who Jesus is.

These angels would say the same thing to you and me. Unto us has been born the Anointed One that will reign forever on the throne of David, our Savior from sin and death, the Lord of all. He came for us! He came to make us His bride. He came to restore what sin has so marred, the image of God in us. But we must receive Him as Savior and Lord if we are to experience His transforming power. We must, like the shepherds of old, seek Him out and worship Him.

Consider: Have you heard the angel’s message?

## 2/21 Luke 2:34-35

*34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”*

Simeon was in the temple in Jerusalem waiting to see the coming of the Messiah. When Joseph and Mary brought baby Jesus there, the Spirit revealed to Simeon that this baby was the One. Simeon broke out into a prophetic utterance describing Jesus as a light for the nations. This was a phrase from the Suffering Servant Songs of Isaiah that were written seven hundred years earlier about the coming Messiah (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6).

Simeon went on to predict that Jesus was appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel. That was certainly true, but not in the way most would have thought. Instead of political rising and falling, God was addressing spiritual elevation and casting down. Those who saw and heard Jesus and then believed were mostly the common folks. Many were even outcasts like the tax collectors and lepers. They were spiritually raised up. But those in power and religious authorities were not only cast down in the eyes of many, but shown the true condition of their heart as they opposed the goodness of Jesus.

A sword must have entered Mary’s heart as she saw her Son hanging from the cross. When it looked like all was lost, the faith of all Jesus’ followers was tested. Mary must have questioned the words of the angel that announced Jesus’ birth (Luke 1:32). God was warning Mary through Simeon that the life of her Son was not going to be what she might expect.

Consider: Life is rarely what we expect. When life is not what we have expected and a sword pierces our hearts, will we trust in the One who knows all and has all power? Will we believe the words of God through the authors of Scripture that teach that all things are in God’s hands? We will experience pain and may not understand what God is doing at times, but we can trust that He will bring us through in a way that ends in our eternal good. Trials reveal the true condition of our faith.

## 2/22 Luke 3:8

*8 Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin 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.*

John the Baptist was proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3). Those who recognized they were sinners and wanted to seek God’s forgiveness came publicly to John in the Jordan River, where he immersed them in its water. It symbolized a washing of the old and a new birth into a new life. But John was not claiming that the act alone would save someone from judgment.

In John’s statement that we look at today, John was declaring that a life had to show the change. It had to produce good things that were the result of the change of heart. That was the only evidence that a change had truly taken place. We can talk about the Scriptures and perform religious rituals, but if these do not affect our lives, we may be only acting as if we have repented.

The Jews of Jesus’ day believed that all children of Abraham would certainly go to heaven. John was declaring that belief to be wrong. Perhaps in an allusion to the prophet Ezekiel’s prophecy of the Messiah turning hearts of stone to hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26), John said that God could raise up children of Abraham from the stones. It was the actions that came from a repentant heart that showed one to be a child of Abraham. The Apostle Paul preached the same message in Romans chapter four. Abraham was a man of faith that resulted in actions. Those whose faith allows God to transform their hearts so that their lives are changed are children of Abraham.

Consider: Our parents’ faith, the church we attend, or the rituals we perform do not change us unless we repent and personally believe. That is the beginning. Then, by the grace of God, we must allow God’s Spirit to bear fruit in our lives.

## 2/23 Luke 3:10

*10 And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?”*

John was preparing people to receive the Messiah, Jesus. They came to him to publicly confess that they were sinners in need of cleansing. When he baptized them he warned them that their actions must show that their heart had changed. They asked what that looked like. John’s answer wasn’t quite what we might imagine.

You might think he’d tell the tax collectors to get another job, but he simply told them to only collect what was owed and no more. We might expect he’d tell the soldiers to end their career, but instead he told them to not extort money by threatening people and to be content with their wages. The one instruction that might be more of a challenge to us today was for those who had two tunics to give to the person that had none and to share our food. In other words, if you have extra, give to the needy.

A tunic was a garment worn under one’s cloak. It was costly in that day, so few people had an extra one. Our closets are full of a variety of clothing so it is difficult to relate to this command. It was to give even what is costly if someone else needs it as a necessity of daily life. This is to have a heart for one’s fellow human and feel another’s need as your own. Repentance and transformation causes us to love our neighbor as ourselves. It causes us to be as concerned about his or her needs as we are about our own. We can easily agree with John’s instruction to be honest and fair and content with what we have, but giving away what is costly to meet the needs of another person is a challenge for us. This is John’s definition of the fruit of repentance.

Prayer: Lord, give me Your heart for others. Help me to hold material things with an open hand, ready to share when I see the need.

## 2/24 Luke 4:18-19

*18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

Jesus was in His hometown synagogue and was invited to read the prophet portion of Scripture and comment on it. In a niche of the synagogue were stored the scroll of Moses, scrolls of the prophets, and scrolls of the writings. Each of these portions of scripture had an assigned portion to be read every Sabbath. The scrolls were not rolled back to the beginning but left where they were read from last. “Unrolling the scroll” simply means rolling back each side to the place last read.

By the providence of God, the passage Jesus was to read that day was about Himself, only He didn’t finish the text. The Isaiah passage goes on to say, “and the day of vengeance of our God (Isaiah 61:2b).” That day will come, but when Jesus read, it was the year of the Lord’s favor. Then He shocked those in attendance by saying the words He read were fulfilled that very day. Jesus was and is the Anointed One, the Christ. He was and is bringing good news to the physically and spiritually poor. He was and is proclaiming freedom from the captivity of sin. He was and is not only restoring physical sight, but spiritual sight, as well. He was and is setting us free from the oppression of our sinful nature. It was and is indeed the year of the Lord’s favor!

Those listening thought it was wonderful until Jesus continued by telling them that they would not receive Him and that God would send the message to the Gentiles. Then they tried to kill Him.

Consider: When presented with the Word of God and confronted by His Spirit, we can repent and receive the truth and be changed, or we can resist and get angry about the message. Sometimes we wonder about the animosity toward Christianity, when every other religion is given a free pass for the strange and even destructive things they teach. It is because the heart of man has been confronted and given the opportunity to change but the hearers resist. God help us to always welcome the Word that confronts us.

## 2/25 Luke 4:43

*4 He said to them, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.”*

Jesus sometimes tried to escape the crowds that sought Him by seeking out desolate places (Luke 5:16). He wanted time to pray and to teach His disciples. The crowds found Him again and tried to get Him to stay in their area. It is likely, in an age when there was little that doctors could do to help the sick or afflicted, that someone with the power to heal would be continually surrounded by those in need. Many have claimed they had this power, and yet we don’t see them continually surrounded by the infirm.

Jesus could not be confined to one place. He had come to preach the Good News of the kingdom of God. That was the purpose for which God the Father sent Him into the world. The good news was that the kingdom of God was at hand (Matthew 4:17). God was about to provide salvation for the world and pour out His Spirit on all who would receive Jesus (Acts 2:16-21). Jesus went from town to town proclaiming in the local synagogues that the Kingdom was about to arrive.

Jesus was preparing the soil for the work the disciples would perform after Jesus’ ascension (Acts 1:8). Those people who saw the power of Jesus and heard Him teach from the Scriptures would be ready to hear of His atoning death and resurrection. That was one reason the church got off to such a powerful start. Your witness to others can have the same effect. We should model something of the life of Jesus in us by loving them, showing our concern in our actions, and sharing the Word. Those we share with may not be ready to enter the Kingdom at that time, but our witness will prepare their hearts for the next witnesses who come along with the Good News of the Kingdom that has come.

Consider: A major part of reaping a harvest is the work that goes before. We prepare the soil, plant the seed, water and weed, and then in time the crop matures. Sometimes we enter a field that has already had all that effort put into it and we get to reap, but most of the time we are somewhere in the preparation stage. Don’t be discouraged if others do not immediately receive your witness.

## 2/26 Luke 5:8

*8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”*

One day when Jesus was teaching on the shore of Galilee, the crowds were pressing against Him. Jesus climbed into Peter’s boat and asked that Peter move it a little ways from the shore. When Jesus finished teaching, He asked Peter to go fishing. Peter had just finished washing his nets after a long night of fishing and catching nothing. *Tilapia galilaea*, now called “Peter’s fish,” would come to the surface at night. Nevertheless, Peter cast off and gave it a try. When they cast their nets, they were filled to the point of almost breaking and they had to call to their partners to help with the catch. Both boats were filled to the point of almost sinking.

Our verse today is Peter’s response. Peter had already met Jesus and heard it said that He was the Messiah (John 1:41). Now Peter believes it! The first thing Peter thought of was his own sinfulness. When we become aware of the presence of holiness, our sins stands out in contrast. Peter did not feel worthy to be around Jesus. Jesus’ response was “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men” (Luke 5:10).

The Bible is so accurate in describing human nature. When we hear the call of God, we think God has the wrong number. How could God use us, as sinful as we are? But then God speaks to our hearts something very similar to the words He spoke to Peter. “Don’t be afraid, from now on you will . . .” He gives us our heavenly assignments and begins to clean up our lives. We just don’t realize how powerful God is, to clean up our lives, to work through even us, and to equip us for what He has called us to do. Don’t be afraid. Trust Him!

Consider: To fall on our knees and recognize our sinfulness is appropriate, but don’t underestimate what God can do with whomever He chooses. The more we recognize our inability, the more we will give God the glory and depend upon Him.

## 2/27 Luke 6:20

*20 And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”*

Luke’s version of the Beatitudes differs from Matthew’s in the wording and the addition of woes. Some people claim this is a contradiction, but having preached for a number of years, I can testify that when I preach on a subject more than once, the sermon is never the same each time. Surely Jesus delivered His Beatitude message more than once. These blessings describe the upside-down world of the kingdom of God. The expressions show us how God sees circumstances as opposed to how man sees them.

Luke’s account emphasizes the physical condition as opposed to Matthew’s account, which emphasizes the spiritual condition. Matthew tells us that Jesus said the poor in spirit are blessed, but Luke tells us Jesus said the poor are blessed. Of course, the poor can include poor in spirit as well as those who are financially poor. Why would those who are financially poor be blessed? A few things come to mind. They are not preoccupied with business and possessions. They are not as tempted to trust in wealth for security. They can’t look to money to solve their problems, but must depend upon God. In another passage Jesus said, “How hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (Luke 18:24).”

God sees the eternal result of our temporal condition as a matter of great importance. If our wealth draws us away from the things of God, it is better that we are poor. We need the eternal perspective to filter the way we understand circumstances in our lives. What appears to be a blessing to our natural way of thinking may really be a curse in its eternal result.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see my circumstances in the light of the revelation of Your Word. Help me to have the discernment to see things through Your eyes.

## 2/28 Luke 6:40

*40 “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.”*

This saying was the understanding of most rabbis and disciples of the first century. The goal of every disciple was to be as much like his teacher as possible, but with the understanding that the disciple would not surpass the teacher. The disciples of that day would each follow his rabbi everywhere, memorizing the blessings he spoke and the prayers he prayed. They would each learn his response to certain questions and imitate his life in every way while serving him.

However, if the teacher is ignorant of spiritual truth, his followers will be, as well. If the teacher has blind spots or prejudices, he will most likely pass them on to his followers. They will be like their teachers. That is why we should make every effort to see our own shortcomings and ask for God to help us to change.

This saying is most applicable to the followers of Jesus. He has no blind spots. He has no lack of spiritual insight. We will never surpass Him, but we can, by the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, be like Him. We must do as those disciples of that age did. We must spend time with Him. Let us learn His response to situations. Let us memorize His words. But most of all, let us follow the way He looked to the Father for direction at all times. Let us learn from Him how to walk through this life in a way that constantly brings glory to God.

Consider: *26 “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him*” (John 12:26).

## 3/1 Luke 6:46

*46 “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”*

After asking the question in our verse for today, Jesus went on to explain that those who hear but never apply His words will meet with ruin. Those who do practice what they hear will stand in the face of difficulties. To say, “No, Lord,” is an oxymoron. If Jesus is your Lord then you will obey Him.

Kings enforce their edicts with punishments for those who disobey. Jesus does not have to use punishment. Disobedience to Jesus brings its own punishment by way of consequence. What Jesus tells us is always for our eternal good. There will come a day when God will render judgment, but we face consequences on a daily basis. Our refusal to forgive eats at our peace. Our lack of humility and our failure to respect others brings contention. Our willful ignorance of moral boundaries brings guilt, emotional turmoil, and sometimes even physical disease. What God tells us is for our good both now and eternally.

It is easy to mouth the right words and declare to others that we are followers of Jesus, but are we taking seriously all that He said? Do we take His words to heart as we would the words of someone we adored? Or are we taking advantage of His grace to our own detriment? How often do we ask ourselves what His teaching says about a situation before we respond? Storms of life are inevitable. We need to apply the words of Jesus to our daily life if we are to survive those storms.

Consider: Is there an area of your life where you will not do what Jesus tells you? It may be a weakness that you have not surrendered to Him. He knows your struggle and will help you if you are willing. You may need the accountability and help of another follower of Jesus to break free and let Jesus be your Lord. Do it!

## 3/2 Luke 7:14-15

*14 Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” 15 And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.*

As Jesus was drawing near the entrance of the city of Nain, a funeral procession was exiting the city. The only son of a widow had died as a young man. A Jewish male was considered a man at the age of thirteen, so he was most likely in his teens. Jesus had compassion on his mother and told her to stop weeping. In that culture, her son was her only means of support. Not only had she lost the last male in the family, but now she would be destitute. How could Jesus ask her to stop weeping? It’s because He knew what He was about to do. He was asking her to have faith and see as He sees. That is a challenge for us. She sees the loss of her dear son and no means of support. Jesus sees a joyful reunion about to take place.

According to the laws of Moses, touching the dead defiles a person. Jesus could not be defiled, so when He touched the bier the young man had to return to life the instant before the contact was made. Jesus’ words created all things and all things must obey His words. When He said “Arise,” the young man had to arise.

Jesus revealed the heart of God toward us all. It is a heart of compassion. The day will come when all who are in the grave will hear the voice of the Son of Man and rise (John 5:28-29). It is a challenge for us to see what Jesus sees instead of the harsh reality of this fallen world. We must look forward through His eyes and see what is coming. Only then can we stop weeping and rejoice for a wonderful day of reunion that will far surpass our expectations.

Consider: Many intelligent people tell us Jesus was a good man and teacher. We should strive to live like Him. “However,” they say, “He was not God.” If you believe that then be a good person and do what He did. Go raise the dead, walk on water, heal every sick person that comes to you, and preach life-altering messages that change the world. This passage tells us that the people declared, “God has visited His people” (Luke 7:17).

## 3/3 Luke 8:2-3

*2  . . . and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3 and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.*

The twelve disciples followed Jesus everywhere He traveled, listening and learning from their Master. The verses for today tell us about the rest of the group. Unlike most rabbis of the first century, Jesus allowed women to follow Him. He even allowed them to finance His ministry. This was surely one of the many reasons that the religious leaders refused to accept Him and His teaching. The apostle Paul understood the reason Jesus did this. Paul wrote that in Jesus, there is neither male or female, slave or free, Greek or Jew, but that all are one in Him (Galatians 3:28). Paul was writing about salvation making us one in Christ. The souls of these women, some of whom had questionable pasts, were just as precious in the eyes of God as those of the twelve apostles.

Jesus did not give the women the role of an apostle, but He did allow them to follow and learn just like the men. Their souls were made in the image of God just as the men’s souls (Genesis 1:27). Jesus recognized different roles for men and women, but valued them equally. He did not care what the world thought, but instead was only concerned for what the heavenly Father desired.

Christians are often slandered as keeping women “barefoot, pregnant, and in the kitchen.” While the Bible has different roles for men and women, it teaches an equality of value. In trying to conform to the world’s current cultural standards, some will try to dismiss parts of Scripture and claim the roles of men and women should be the same. That is to deny that God made us differently for a purpose. Instead, we should acknowledge the differences while affirming the equality in value.

Prayer: Lord, help me to value every soul as precious to You and to see each one’s eternal potential. Help me to see each person through Your eyes of unselfish love.

## 3/4 Luke 9:30-31

*30 And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, 31 who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*

In my first devotional book, *Through the Bible Daily Devotions* (March 9 evening),I wrote that what Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about was a mystery. However, Luke’s gospel is unique in that it tells us that they spoke of Jesus’ departure in Jerusalem. This expression could also imply His death. That is the only clue we have as to what they discussed. From that time forward Jesus began to mention His impending death to His disciples (Luke 9:44).

As a child, Jesus grew in wisdom (Luke 2:40). He gave God the credit for the things done through Him (John 14:10). He said that He only did what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19). Though Jesus was all God and all man, He relied upon the Holy Spirit. Theologians ponder just what Jesus left behind when He was incarnated in the womb of Mary (Philippians 2:7). It seems that omniscience was one of those things Jesus emptied Himself of to dwell among us. What He did know came in the same way we can know things. We learn from the Word and the Holy Spirit. We may even have a revelation as Jesus did on the Mount of Transfiguration. The great difference between Jesus and us is that He did not have a sin nature to interfere with His communion with the Spirit and understanding of the Word.

As we grow in the Lord and refuse to make provision for sin in our lives (Romans 13:14), our understanding of the Word and communion with the Holy Spirit becomes increasingly richer. If we say we want to be closer to the Lord and hear Him more clearly, refusing to give place to sin in our lives is where we must start. Then we must take time to meditate upon the Word and listen to the Holy Spirit.

Consider: Many people desire a revelation, to clearly hear the voice of God. Not many will diligently commit the time and effort to be in the Word and prayer. What about you?

## 3/5 Luke 9:50

*50 But Jesus said to him, “Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you.”*

The disciples saw a man casting out demons in Jesus’ name (Mark 9:38-40). They tried to stop the man because he wasn’t following Jesus with them. At the time, they thought everyone who wanted to do works in Jesus’ name must follow Jesus every day and learn from Him just as they were.

Jesus corrected their misunderstanding. If someone was doing something in His name, how could they speak evil of Him? If they weren’t against Jesus, then they were for Him. There is no middle ground. Jesus’ actions and words cause people to come to a decision point. We don’t have to push people into making a decision. We just tell them what Jesus said and did and they will have to decide. The man casting out the demons had obviously chosen to believe in Jesus, but was not following the Master in the traditional Jewish sense.

We need to hear this teaching today. With so many denominations and different emphases, we can be critical of those who don’t follow just as we do. They may differ with us on minor doctrines or believe Christians must do certain rituals that are foreign to us. The bottom line is: Have they decided for Jesus? And if they do not oppose your decision for Jesus and way of following Him, then they are really with you. However, those who are against you and try to draw away those in your fellowship are against you. They are advancing their own kingdom, not God's kingdom.

Consider: We should be careful not to criticize those who worship and serve the Lord Jesus in a way that is different from our own. We may be criticizing those who are closer to the Lord than we are.

## 3/6 Luke 9:54

*54 And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?”*

Upon Jesus’ final trip into Jerusalem, the disciples went ahead to prepare towns to greet Jesus. The Samaritans would not welcome Jesus because He was going to Jerusalem. They believed Mount Gerizim was the proper place to worship. James and John had recently seen Jesus transfigured and interpreted that to mean Jesus was soon going to set up an earthly kingdom. They suggested that they call fire down from heaven to consume the Samaritans.

Jesus rebuked His disciples. Some later manuscripts add that Jesus told the brothers that they did not know of what manner of spirit they were. Jesus had not come to destroy lives but to save lives. We can’t be sure that addition is authentic, but it has a ring of truth to it. Jesus was on His way to die for sin. Samaria would experience a great revival and John would see them receive a different fire, the fire of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-15).

This gives us an example of the previous devotional. Many of the Samaritans had received Jesus (John 4:42). They still did not like the fact that He was going to Jerusalem and did not welcome Him at that time because of their disagreement over a doctrinal issue. They didn’t try to convert the disciples to their way of thinking. There was hope for them that we see fulfilled in the Book of Acts. Be slow to jump to judgment. Jesus would rather save lives than see them destroyed. Your patience today may provide an opportunity in the future.

Consider: When we condemn others for their minor doctrinal differences, we are of the same spirit as James and John. The Spirit of Jesus would have us be patient and watch for opportunities to share the Good News more fully in His perfect time.

## 3/7 Luke 10:16

*16 “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”*

Our verse today was Jesus’ sendoff message to the seventy-two evangelists. It would be applicable to all who proclaim the message of Jesus. When we speak to others in the power of the Spirit, seeking to advance His kingdom and sharing what He has done for us and for them, the hearers are listening to Jesus. They hear His call to come and worship Him and become a child of God. The hearers have two choices. They can receive what you say, receive Jesus, and become a child of God, or they can reject God’s call and remain in their rebellion against God. We invite people to stop resisting God and instead surrender to Him and become a spiritual soldier of the cross.

We aren’t all called to be evangelists, but we all have opportunities to share what Jesus has done in our lives. We all have those times when we can allow the Spirit of God to address the needs in others’ hearts. At first we might fear rejection, but we must realize that those who reject our message of the work of Jesus in our own lives are ultimately rejecting God. The rejection isn’t because we don’t have a perfect presentation or haven’t studied enough. It is simply their rejection of God’s right to reign in their hearts.

When we realize it is not about us, it is much easier to not be personally offended. Instead, we have broken hearts for those who reject the message because they have accepted a lie that will destroy them. The lie tells them the things of this world will satisfy and that God will take all pleasure from them and make them do things they hate. Our joy in the Lord may help them see the lie for what it is.

Remember: Our most effective witness is to tell what Jesus has done in our lives. Your testimony will have the ring of truth if you have found joy and peace in Jesus.

## 3/8 Luke 10:22

*22 “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”*

The seventy-two evangelists had returned victorious from their mission. Jesus told them not to rejoice because they had power to do miracles, but to rejoice that their names were written in heaven. That was when Jesus uttered the words we are looking at today. This is one of the many statements of Jesus that could never be put in the mouth of any other being. He declared that God gave Him authority over everything! Nothing happens unless Jesus allows it. What comfort that should be to those of us who serve Him! Every difficulty we face, He has allowed. Every victory we experience is because of His authority working in our lives.

That one statement is enough to declare Jesus the divine King of kings. But He continued, “and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son.” Jesus said He is the only one who knows who God is! Imagine your pastor saying that. You’d know he lost his mind or was starting a cult. But Jesus’ life validates His claim. God is the only One who really knows Jesus, and Jesus is the only One who really knows God.

We would despair if Jesus did not go on to say, “and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.” We can know who God is, but only through a personal revelation of Jesus to each of us. But now let’s put it into context. The evangelists just came back rejoicing at the way people had received their message. Jesus was explaining that the reason the evangelists were successful was the authority Jesus exercised in their hearts and the hearts of those who heard them. Jesus was the One who revealed God to the listeners. So it was with us when we first heard; and so it is with those who hear the message we deliver. Jesus reveals God through His messengers to those whose hearts He has prepared. All the glory is His.

Consider: The One who alone has all authority goes before us and prepares hearts to receive a revelation of who God is. As we share the message, Jesus reveals God to them and they come to know who God is in all His love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

## 3/9 Luke 10:36-37

*36 “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” 37 He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”*

An expert in the Mosaic Laws tested Jesus by asking Him what one must do to have eternal life. Jesus put it back on the man by asking him what he thought was necessary. The man said it was to love God and your neighbor. Jesus agreed and told him to go and do it. The man knew loving one’s neighbor might be more difficult than it sounded, so he asked for a definition of “neighbor.” That might narrow it down to make the command a bit more easy to practice.

Jesus told a story about a man who was beaten and robbed. Two different religious people walked by, one after the other, and both ignored the man. Then a Samaritan came along. Samaritans were despised by Jews, but this Samaritan had compassion on the man, dressed his wounds, put him on his donkey, took him to an inn, and promised to return and take care of any expenses. Jesus asked which of the men that passed by was a neighbor to the man that was robbed. You’ll notice in our verse for today the Scripture expert couldn’t even bring himself to say “Samaritan.” He just said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus didn’t tighten up the definition of “neighbor.” He expanded it!

How can we have this kind of mercy for our fellow man? It is only possible when the love of God has filled our hearts. If we truly love God first, we will love those made in His image, those He came to redeem. The Samaritan was willing to pay any cost to care for the needs of a man whose race despised his race. Jesus was not only hinting at the unbiased nature of the kingdom of God, but also of the potential of religion to substitute for genuine conversion.

Consider: What am I willing to expend when I see someone in need? Do I have religion or have I experienced genuine conversion?

## 3/10 Luke 11:28

*28 But he said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”*

In the first chapter of the gospel of Luke, Mary is told by an angel that she has found favor with God (Luke 1:28, 30). Elizabeth told Mary, “blessed are you among women” (Luke 1:42). One major branch of Christianity has taken these passages to exalt Mary and have even worshiped her. Some think she should be elevated to the status of co-Redeemer. We have come to a passage in Luke in which we get some clarification and balance on this issue.

As Jesus preached, a woman in the crowd yelled out that the womb that bore Jesus and the breasts that nursed Him were certainly blessed. Women of that day prayed to be the mother of the Messiah. This woman was saying that Mary was that blessed woman. Jesus responded with our verse for today. Those who are truly blessed are those who hear the Word of God and live it out. He is saying that everyone who will listen to God’s Word and put it into practice are those we can know are the blessed ones. He was not denying that Mary was blessed, but that we should say that all who hear and do the Word of God are blessed.

Do you want to be as blessed as Mary, mother of the Word made flesh? Jesus said that you can be, by hearing and obeying the word of God. To “keep” the Word is to remember and live according to it. It is to value it as a treasure. The Word of God delivered to us from the prophets and apostles is God’s revelation of Himself to us. It is the message from our Creator to guide us out of darkness and into the light. It is the power by which our lives are transformed and our minds are renewed. God will bless you as much as you cling to the Word and live according to it.

Consider: Is the word of God your life (Proverbs 4:13)?

## 3/11 Luke 12:37

*37 “Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.”*

In this parable, the master of the house goes away to attend a wedding feast. In Israel that could mean seven days of celebration. The final day may run late into the night. The following verses suggest the master might return as late as three in the morning. During this time while the master is away, the servants have only a few responsibilities, but while performing them they must watch for their master’s return.

This is one of a number of parables in which Jesus explained that He would be away for an extended period of time. We can be lazy and take advantage of His absence, or we can be diligent and watch for His return. The later the return, the more difficult it is for the servants to keep watch for Him. The ones He discovers watching will find that He has them recline at table and He will come and serve them.

This is an incredibly generous scenario. The Lord of all Creation will serve His faithful servants. But that is exactly what Jesus did on the shore of Galilee after His resurrection (John 21:13). That is what He will do when He comes to bring us home. The only difference between this parable and His appearing is that instead of leaving to go to a wedding feast, He returns to host a wedding feast. The Groom will be serving the bride.

Our period of service here may seem long and tedious at times. It may seem like the Master has delayed His return. But He will come, and blessed are those servants the Master finds awake when He comes!

Remember: Don’t be lulled to sleep by the pleasures of this life and deceitfulness of riches. Stay alert and active in service. Keep watching for our Master’s return with joyful anticipation.

## 3/12 Luke 13:4-5

*4 “Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? 5 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”*

Some people told Jesus the news of Pilate mixing the blood of some Galileans with their sacrifices. Jesus saw the attitude of those who told Him the news as suggesting that those Galileans were being judged for some of the evil they had done. Jesus reminded them of others in Jerusalem who had died when a tower collapsed on them. Were they being judged because they were more evil than everyone else living in Jerusalem? Jesus emphatically stated that this was not the case.

Death will come to us all. God has numbered our days. The manner in which we die is not indicative of our degree of sinfulness. Every person is a sinner. Every person will stand before God to be judged. When the people suggested these who died were worse sinners, they were downplaying their own sinfulness and need of repentance. Jesus said they would all likewise perish if they did not repent. That generation would see the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army. Thousands would be crucified along the roads because they sought an earthly kingdom and rejected the heavenly one.

People often express the thought, “I’m not as bad as so-and-so.” Comparing ourselves with others is a foolish endeavor. We should be comparing ourselves to the one perfect person, Jesus. Then we would all see how far we have to go and recognize our need of repentance. The very next account in Luke warns of the impending judgment upon Israel if the nation does not bear fruit unto God.

Consider: When we hear of others who have died suddenly in an accident or by illness, we can’t help but wonder about their spiritual state. It should cause us to ask ourselves, Am I seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? (Matthew 6:33)

## 3/13 Luke 13:11-12

*11 And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability.”*

As Jesus was teaching in a synagogue one Sabbath, He noticed a woman who was bent over. The passage tells us the source of the problem was a disabling spirit. Jesus called her over and told her that she was freed from the disability. He put His hands on her and immediately she straightened up and gave glory to God.

The ruler of the synagogue was indignant. He told the congregation that they should come any of the other six days of the week to be healed, but not on the Sabbath. Jesus called the ruler and all who agreed with him hypocrites. He reminded them that they untied their ox or donkey on the Sabbath to lead it to water. Then Jesus asked if this woman who was a descendant of Abraham shouldn’t be untied from her affliction on the Sabbath.

Jesus used a method of debate that they were familiar with: lesser to greater. If you could do this act for an animal on the Sabbath, then why not for a human who has more value in the eyes of God? Jesus’ adversaries were ashamed but the crowd rejoiced at the glorious things done by Him. Jesus had once again shown that the heart of the heavenly Father is not to have you perform meaningless rituals or obey just to obey, but to love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18). Love fulfills the law (Romans 13:10).

Consider: Jesus taught that the heart of God was gracious and merciful. If a religious rule and the law of love are in conflict, the more important thing is to show love to others. We can have the religious leader’s tendency to put rules first, so we must always remember God’s rules are based on love for Him and for our neighbor.

## 3/14 Luke 13:24

*24 “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.”*

Someone asked Jesus if many would be saved. It is still a hot topic today. Many reject Christianity because of the answer Jesus gave to this question. His answer began with our verse for today. Many will seek to enter the narrow door but will not be able. That will never be a popular answer. Man wants everyone to enter so that we can be sure that we will. Popular opinion rarely recognizes truth.

We know from the rest of Scripture that salvation is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). What does Jesus then mean by “strive”? And what is the narrow door? We can see in John’s gospel that Jesus referred to Himself as the door through which we must enter to be saved (John 10:9). How can we strive to enter into Jesus to be saved? Paul the apostle told Timothy to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold of eternal life (1 Timothy 6:12). Paul’s words are very similar to what Jesus was saying in our passage for today.

While salvation is a free gift of God’s grace that we receive by faith, we must exercise that faith through a great effort. It is a fight to leave the desires of the old nature and the selfishness that have enslaved us for so long and enter the door of unselfish love for God and our fellow man. Yielding to the life of Christ in us is not for wimpy, apathetic slackers. Jesus said we must force our way into the kingdom of heaven (Luke 16:16). We recognize that we cannot be good enough to earn salvation. However, once we recognize that salvation was earned for us, then we must strive to take hold of what is truly life (1 Timothy 6:19). We misdirect seekers when we tell them all they have to do is receive the free gift and they are set for eternity. Life in the Spirit is a spiritual battle.

Consider: For many readers, exercising one’s faith day by day is a concept you may have never heard before. I encourage you to read the references above along with Ephesians 6:10-18 and Matthew 25:31-46. Do-nothing Christianity is not the life of the redeemed.

## 3/15 Luke 14:23

*23 “And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.’”*

Luke’s account of the parable of the great banquet came in response to someone saying how blessed would be those who ate bread in the kingdom of God. The person assumed all Jews would be included. Jesus’ parable declared that those who were invited made excuses because of other priorities in their lives. The master who had the banquet prepared then sent his servants to bring in all those they could find, including the poor, crippled, blind, and the lame. Still there was room. He sent them again but to a greater distance and had the servants compel those they found to come in so the master’s house would be filled.

Jesus seemed to be regularly challenging the assumptions of the religious elite of His day. The religious leaders thought for sure they would make it into the Kingdom. They believed most if not all Jews would be there, but certainly not Samaritans and Gentiles.

The parable shows us the great heart of God that sends missionaries and evangelists to every corner of the world that His house may be filled. He even commands us to compel them to come in. God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). He desires that as many as are willing should be there with Him. However, some guests will have other priorities and refuse to come even though they have been invited.

Consider: Do you have assumptions about who will be in heaven? How does this parable speak to you? What mindset does it encourage us to have?

## 3/16 Luke 17:3

*3 “Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.”*

Jesus was instructing His disciples on how important it is to not tempt others to sin. He added this instruction found only in Luke’s gospel. Brothers and sisters in Christ are supposed to look out for one another. We are like soldiers in battle. Sin is the weapon of the Enemy to bring us down. Sin can even cause us to do damage to our fellow soldiers. That is why we must pay attention to ourselves to see that we are not yielding to the Enemy.

When we see a brother or sister compromising with the Enemy, Jesus says to rebuke him or her. We have to warn one another. Sin is subtle. We often justify in our minds why it is all right to engage in some kind of sin. Sometimes it is a part of our old lives that we never really understood was sinful, so we don’t think twice about going back to that behavior. This is when we need someone to step in and rebuke us. We usually know in our spirits that we are compromising with Enemy. The rebuke confirms it. Sometimes we don’t take the rebuke and become upset, but in time we realize it was done in love.

Isn’t it God who forgives the repentant sinner? Yes, but the sins of our fellow soldiers also affect our effectiveness in the battle. None of us is alone. As parts of the body of Christ, the infection of any part can harm the rest of the entire body. We forgive the one who repents for compromising our mission. When you choose to sin, you not only harm yourself, but also your brothers and sisters in Christ. Pay attention to yourselves!

Remember: No one likes to call others out and rebuke their sin. It risks our relationship with them. However, love will realize how important it is to do so.

## 3/17 Luke 17:32

*32 “Remember Lot’s wife.”*

Jesus described His return as a time like the days of Noah and Lot. During those times, individuals were wholly engaged in pleasure seeking regardless of the cost to anyone else. In a mighty display of God’s justice, He suddenly destroyed them, but he spared a few righteous souls out of the midst of the devastation. Jesus was emphasizing the pervasiveness of wickedness and the suddenness of the destruction that would come.

That is when the Son of Man will be revealed. The righteous are to flee and not look back. Luke uses expressions that are applied in a different context in the other Gospels, but certainly Jesus could have used the same words with differing applications, as we all do. Only Luke records Jesus urging His followers to remember Lot’s wife.

When Lot’s family was fleeing the impending judgment on Sodom, the angel that delivered them warned them not to look back (Genesis 19:17). When the brimstone began to fall, Lot’s wife turned to see it and died instantly (Genesis 19: 26). The warning is applicable to these times of judgment and to every day. If our hearts are longing for the illicit pleasures of the world, we turn ourselves away from God and toward selfish indulgence. By doing so we discount the high call of God upon our lives along with all the promises of the Word, and consider the abuse of creation for momentary thrills as more worthwhile.

Consider: Each of us needs to personally know Christ to realize the greatness of His love, the wonder of His salvation, and the certainty of His promises. If we don’t, we will be double-minded, wondering if the world has more to offer. You and I can’t learn the world has nothing of value from others. It must be the experience of our own hearts.

## 3/18 Luke 18:6-7

*6 And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?”*

Jesus told a parable to help us remember we should not lose heart regarding our prayer requests. The parable is about a judge who had no fear of God and a widow who kept coming to him for justice against the one who wronged her. Though the unrighteous judge did not fear God or respect men, the widow’s persistent coming to him wore him down.

Jesus was teaching by way of contrast. If an unrighteous judge would give in to persistence, would not God, who loves us and is just, give justice to us when we continually bring our requests to Him? Will God put us off and delay exercising justice?

The parable teaches that God will act when we bring our requests before Him. So then, why do we often see our requests delayed or unanswered? There are a number of possibilities. First, is your sense of justice the same as God’s? Perhaps God sees the situation you are praying about in a much different light. Only God can see the heart of your adversary. Another possibility is that we may be praying from selfish hearts. James tells us God does not grant our requests because we ask wrongly, to satisfy selfish passions (James 4:3). However, when your cause is clearly righteous, you can be sure that God hears and will act. Don’t give up. Sometimes it takes time for circumstances to be ordered so that justice will be complete and clear to those who observe it.

Remember: Check your heart when you pray to be sure it is pure. Pray according to God’s will and, though it may take time, you can be sure that God will be just (1 John 5:14).

## 3/19 Luke 19:10

*10 “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*

The throngs in Jericho were excited to see Jesus. Even a tax collector was desperate to see Him. Behaving in a way that others would have seen as quite undignified, the short-in-stature tax collector Zacchaeus climbed a tree to get a look at Jesus as He passed by. Jesus stopped under the tree and called Zacchaeus to come down. Jesus went to Zacchaeus’s house for a meal. The crowd grumbled about Jesus going to eat with a sinner. After all, this tax collector worked for Rome. He was a compromiser and associated with Gentiles. How could Jesus go eat with such a man?

Zacchaeus was so moved by Jesus’ willingness to associate with him that he promised to give half of his possessions to the poor and restore fourfold any money he had fraudulently taken from others. Jesus said salvation had come to Zacchaeus’ home that day and declared him to be a son of Abraham. That means Zacchaeus became a person of faith, as Abraham is the father of the faithful (Romans 4:16).

God seems to delight in choosing those on whom we would have little hope. The apostle Paul, once a killer of Christians, comes to mind. In one of the worst prisons in the world today, Angola penitentiary, God is transforming ruthless gang members into evangelists. Does God choose them because it shows His mighty power to transform the human heart, or is it because they recognize how desperately they need a Savior? Perhaps it is to show us that no one has fallen so far that the grace of God cannot transform that person into a servant of the most High God.

Consider: Are there people whom you come in contact with that you think are too lost to ever turn to God? Perhaps you think that *you* have been too wicked to become God’s servant. We are all hopelessly lost without Jesus. He can transform anyone who receives Him joyfully, just like Zacchaeus did.

## 3/20 Luke 19:27

*27 “‘But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.’”*

The Gospels have two parables about a master, also called a nobleman, who gives money to his servants to invest while he is away for a time (Matthew 25:14-30). Luke tells us a version of the parable in which a nobleman goes away to receive a kingdom. This is similar to an actual historical event that happened around that same time. Herod had gone to receive authority from Caesar to govern the area and the Jews had sent a delegation to argue against Herod ruling. When Herod returned, he executed those who openly opposed his rule. The parable was interwoven with an historical event to cause the hearers to think about the consequences of rejecting the Messiah.

The main theme of the parable and the similar one in Matthew is that our lives are short and we have the obligation to invest the gifts we’ve been given from God. We will give an account for God’s investment in us (Romans 14:12). God will reward those who use their gifts with more authority in His service. He will punish those who hide their gifts or refuse to use them. But Luke’s version adds another key point. There are those who resist the authority of the king. Just as Herod destroyed those who resisted his reign, will not God who is righteous judge those who resist His good rule over us?

We see Jesus’ gracious and forgiving heart on the cross when He asked for God to forgive those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34). However, there will come a day when the King returns to judge the earth. God will have extended grace and mercy to the limit, and still there will be those who resist His reign. Jesus spoke of judgment and hell so that no one would mistake His gracious actions during His incarnation with the final judgment when He returns to reign. In Christ we see the perfect blend of grace and justice that describe portions of His nature. All of His perfect attributes are summed up in the term “holy.”

Consider: In our day there is an emphasis on the goodness and mercy of God without a warning of a final judgment. While we need to demonstrate love, love does not neglect to warn of a coming day of justice.

## 3/21 Luke 19:40

*40 He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”*

Jesus often made reference to Old Testament passages that more fully expressed what He meant. In this case, the crowds were praising Jesus as the Messiah. The religious leaders wanted Jesus to rebuke His disciples. Our verse today was Jesus’ answer to them. At first glance it seems that Jesus was simply saying that He must receive praise. That is true, but there was an additional meaning that the leaders would have understood. When we look at the same words in the Old Testament book of Habakkuk, we find another message.

The prophecy that the stones will cry out in Habakkuk 2:11-16 is of judgment upon those who have gathered unjust gain and had done violence to the innocent. That prophecy declares that utter shame will come upon their glory. In Jesus’ time, the religious leaders were making themselves rich from the controlling the temple trade. They were already plotting to kill Jesus. While they received glory from men for their high standing in society, the coming destruction that Jesus wept over in the next verses in Luke would bring them utter shame. Right after weeping over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), Jesus cleansed the temple of all the merchandizing that was going on there.

Jesus was saying that if the people were quiet the stones would cry out in judgment against the religious leaders. Those leaders were not living for God but were using religion to profit and to gain respect from men. Wealth and fame are two of the greatest pitfalls that lure us into compromise.

Remember: If our faith is real, we will live for God and not simply for personal gain. We must always be on guard against the allurements of unjust gain and the respect of men, lest the stones cry out against us.

## 3/22 Luke 21:24

*24 “They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”*

There is a key expression in this verse that appears only in Luke’s gospel. Jesus was speaking of the destruction of the temple. That was something unimaginable to the Jews of that day. The structure was one of the wonders of the world. They saw it as the habitation of God on earth. At that time, Jesus had become the dwelling of God on earth and was about to begin His church, which would carry on that role as the living temple of God.

The revelation in these words from Jesus is that there would be a period of time in which Jerusalem would be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles. That period of time began in AD 70 and has continued to this day. It is amazing that when the Jews retook the Temple Mount in the Six-Day War, they allowed the Muslims to maintain control of the area. Jews will not go up to the Temple Mount out of concern that they may accidentally walk where the Holy of Holies once stood. Gentile tourists daily trample the area underfoot while Jews worship around the foundation of the structure.

The apostle Paul tells us that night is passing and the day is about to dawn. He is speaking of the end of the times of the Gentiles and the return of Christ. If you visit Jerusalem, I recommend a visit to the Temple Institute, where you can marvel at almost everything needed and ready for the preparation of a new temple according to Jewish prophecy. Only a few prophecies are yet to be fulfilled for the times of the Gentiles to come to a close. Paul’s conclusion to this inevitability is that we must put off the works of darkness and clothe ourselves in the armor of light (Romans 13:12).

Consider: The church has always lived expecting that day to come at any moment. Are you?

## 3/23 Luke 21:34

*34 “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.”*

Jesus was speaking of the times of trouble that would come upon the earth just before His return. He said there would be distress among the nations in perplexity, and that men’s hearts would fail them for fear of what was coming upon the earth. But that is when believers should straighten up and lift up their heads. Their redemption will be at hand.

Jesus warned us not to fall into the patterns of the world. The Greek word translated “dissipation” refers to a headache or sudden pain. In this case it may be a hangover. When times become difficult, people will be tempted to escape into drunkenness. The relief is only temporary and then we find our hearts weighed down with a hangover. We are worse off than we were before. Imagine seeing the Lord return while your head is throbbing from a hangover.

We can also become caught up with anxiety, watching the news nonstop, and talking about all the things that should be different. God’s word tells us to cast all our anxiety on the Lord and let Him sustain us (Philippians 4:6). Those cares only distract us from God’s call on our lives. Whether we are trying to escape through alcohol or getting an ulcer from watching the news, these responses do not demonstrate trust in the Lord or being about His work until His return. How much better it would be to be joyfully serving Jesus at the moment we see Him! Instead of feeling like we’re being caught in a trap, we will experience at that moment the glorious conclusion of a life lived in love and trust in our Creator.

Consider: Watch yourselves! Don’t give the Devil a foothold (Ephesians 4:27). Stay in the Word, prayer, and fellowship.

## 3/24 Luke 22:15

*15 And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.*

Jesus’ desire to share the Last Supper with His disciples speaks of His passion to worship the Father with those who come to the Father through Him. Jesus’ life was worship of the Father. His consistent obedience and love for all people was an act of worship. The Passover meal was one of the great unifying feasts of Israel. It reminded the people of their common past and the love of God that miraculously delivered them from their captors. It was meal of remembrance and worship as they applied the lessons of old to their present relationship with God.

Jesus could see how He was the fulfillment of the greater deliverance pictured in the Passover. He earnestly desired that, during this time of worship, the disciples would see that He was about to give Himself to set them free from the bondage of sin and death. He longed for them to see that He was the Lamb of God that would take away their sins. Though they did not know it yet, his act of service in washing their feet was going to be followed by the greatest act of humility—giving Himself as the Passover lamb for all who would partake of Him. The Old Covenant was about to reach its culmination. History was about to meet its turning point. Death was about to die.

What do you earnestly desire? Jesus’ passion for the glory of the Father and the coming of the Kingdom sets before us the greatest longing. Every other desire should be a distant second. Our desires reveal our spiritual maturity.

Prayer: Lord, give us Your own passion to glorify the Father. Help us to be most passionate for what is eternal and keep the temporal in its proper place. Order our priorities in life according to what is really of value.

## 3/25 Luke 22:33-34

*33 Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” 34 Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”*

This is an illustration of man’s certainty meeting reality. Peter was so sure that even if all others denied Jesus, he would follow Him. But when Jesus told Peter to put away his sword, Peter saw that following cost more than he was willing to pay. He said he was ready to go to prison and even death, but he didn’t really know his own heart.

Jesus’ certainty, on the other hand, is reality. He knows our hearts better than we know our own, and yet He loves us still. Jesus knew Peter would deny Him, but I also believe He knew of the remorse that would fill Peter’s heart. We cannot make ourselves strong by our own will power and determination, but God can, by His gentle and merciful love. It is His love that empowers us to go where we would never have gone before.

Each of us has an opinion of where we are in our walk with the Lord, but then along comes reality. Our failures serve to open our eyes to our weaknesses and drive us to humbly kneel before our Savior and confess, “I can’t.” Then we meet the love and forgiveness that enables us to do what we know we cannot do. Faith in a power greater than our own empowers us to rise above our limitations and walk in victory over our weaknesses. It is a painful road. It is a glorious road, as well.

Consider: We can never be sure how we will react to a situation until we face it. But we can learn the habit of always looking to the Lord for His leading rather than relying on our own strength.

## 3/26 Luke 23:25

*25 He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.*

This verse certainly addresses the depravity of man. If you ever wondered how bad the fall of humankind was in the Garden of Eden, here you have an answer. We would choose an insurrectionist murderer over our Creator. The Jews wanted their sovereignty as a nation restored more than they wanted to see an innocent teacher and healer saved from a torturous death. In our fallen state, we would rather have freedom from taxation than freedom from sin that leads to death.

It’s even worse than that. Pilate gave in to the will of the people, and their will was to crucify Jesus. Later, after Jesus’ resurrection when Peter preached to the crowd at Pentecost, part of his message was that “you crucified and killed” Jesus (Acts 2:23). Those listeners had just arrived for the Feast of Pentecost, but they had the same depraved hearts that would have made the same choice as the crowd that had called for Jesus to be crucified. That is our condition as fallen humanity.

Thank God that this is what Jesus was actually dying to change. Only if we are redeemed so that the Spirit can be poured out on us could our wills ever be changed to prefer the eternal over the temporal. Only by the power of the Spirit can we choose to die to our old nature and live in Christ as His servants. We put on Jesus and make no provision for sinful desires by a power that is not natural to us humans (Romans 13:14).

Consider: Moment by moment we choose from which nature we will live. Never underestimate how depraved the old nature is in others and in you.

## 3/27 Luke 23:26

*26 And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus*.

Four Roman soldiers led Jesus as He carried His own cross through Jerusalem toward Calvary. One soldier in front would have had a sign that stated Jesus’ crime to warn others of their fate if they tried such a thing. Jesus’ crime simply read, “King of the Jews.” Jesus could not physically finish the route. The scourging had drained His body of what strength He had left. The soldiers would command another person to finish the task of carrying the cross. If the flat side of a sword tapped your shoulder, you were compelled to serve your occupiers, and Simon of Cyrene felt his shoulder tapped to carry the cross behind Jesus.

Cyrene is modern day Tripoli. Simon was probably a Jew who had scraped and saved much of his life to make a trip to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover with Jews from all over the world. Suddenly his joy turned to horror as the soldiers forced him to carry the cross and follow Jesus. Some of us feel similar emotions when the Lord taps our shoulders and calls us to do the same. Yet carrying our own cross is what Jesus said we must do if we would follow him (Luke 9:23).

Mark tells us Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21). One would not identify a person by their children unless their children were well-known. Apparently, as Simon witnessed Jesus’ composure, His warning to the women to weep for themselves, and His forgiveness of those who crucified Him, Simon’s heart was drawn to find out who this man was and why he was so different. It is believed that Mark wrote his gospel to the church in Rome. Combine this with the fact that the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans writes, “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother who is a mother to me as well” (Rom 16:13). It appears that Simon had conveyed his faith to his wife and son. Simon had come to partake of a Passover lamb and ended up partaking of the Passover Lamb that takes away the sins of the world.

Consider: You may be shocked to hear the voice of God in your heart commanding you: “Take up your cross and follow My Son.” The fruit of doing so may be the eternal destiny of your own family.

## 3/28 Luke 23:43

*43 And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”*

Luke’s gospel is the only one that tells us about the repentant thief. The book of Luke appears to be written after the books of Matthew and Mark, and the book of John was written last. Because of the additional details that Luke and John add, critics say they were embellishing the story. Today, when someone writes a biography and has more details than earlier biographies, we simply assume that the writer found more sources and wanted to give a more complete picture of the person. Why would that not be true with someone as important as Jesus? Luke began his gospel by telling us that these are eyewitness reports that he carefully investigated (Luke 1:1-4).

Apparently the thieves both mocked Jesus at first, but then one of them, realizing that he was about to die, became repentant. We call this a deathbed conversion. Watching the way Jesus dealt with His suffering and the kindness and forgiveness He demonstrated even from the cross must have touched the thief. Even the centurion that oversaw the crucifixion declared that Jesus must have been innocent (Luke 23:47). The thief realized he was headed for God’s judgment and needed mercy. He recognized Jesus was the Lord and asked Jesus to remember him.

Our verse today is Jesus’ response to the thief. It has profound theological significance. Jesus knew where He was going. He knew the thief would be there with him that very day. The thief did nothing to earn salvation. He simply asked for mercy. He wasn’t baptized. He did not follow his conversion with good deeds, for he couldn’t. Jesus’ gracious actions in the midst of great suffering testified to the truth of who He is and brought about the conversion of some of those who witnessed His suffering.

Consider: Our words and actions are speaking about our faith, especially in times of difficulty. May the Lord help us to demonstrate the grace and forgiveness of Jesus when we face hardship. Perhaps you might share this passage with those who think they could never be good enough for Jesus to accept them.

## 3/29 Luke 24:5-6

*5 And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee . . .”*

At early dawn after the Sabbath, a group of women who had followed Jesus were taking spices to His tomb. They were shocked to find that the stone was rolled from the entrance of the tomb and Jesus’ body wasn’t there. They had brought the spices to cover the smell of decomposition so they could continue to visit the tomb. Suddenly, two men in dazzling apparel stood by them. They asked why the women sought the living among the dead. Did the women think light could be extinguished by darkness? Did they think the One by whom all things exist could cease to exist? The angels told them Jesus was not there. He had risen! Death had been swallowed up in victory. This was not only the miracle of resurrection, but even more, the One who said “I am the resurrection and the life” had defeated death! (John 11:25).

Angels must wonder why we are so slow to believe. They see God’s mighty deeds and the power of His Word. Sin does not fill their minds with doubt and cloud their understanding of the works of God in the world. I imagine they were watching in wonder as Jesus taught and showed the signs of His authority over the natural world. But when the crowd yelled for Barabbas, when the disciples fled, or when the women expected to find a decaying body, they must have been amazed at how slow humans are to see what they see.

These two angels gently reminded the women that they had forgotten something. Jesus told them He would rise from the dead after three days (Luke 9:22). How could they not believe the words of the One whose words formed the world and all that is in it? How could they hear such a wondrous promise and just forget it? It’s like an adult trying to calm a little child. “There, there, remember that Daddy said he would come home tonight.” Let’s grow up and take His words to heart in total belief! He’s alive!

Consider: Do you remember that Jesus said, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also”? (John 14:3). Live in full confidence that every word He speaks will come to pass.

## 3/30 John 1:38-39

*38 Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), where are you staying?”39 He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.*

John the Baptist pointed out Jesus and called Him the Lamb of God. Two of John’s disciples followed Jesus and asked where He was staying. The place where John was baptizing was near Kochaba, a town of the descendants of David. Perhaps Jesus was staying there with relatives. Jesus’ invitation was more about what these two disciples were seeking than about the actual place He was lodging for the night. He had just returned from forty days of fasting and the temptation in the wilderness. His ministry was just beginning. The years of quiet preparation in communion with the Father had begun to manifest themselves in words and actions.

We don’t know exactly what the two disciples of John saw, but whatever they witnessed convinced them that Jesus was the Messiah. They followed Him back to Galilee and began to tell others they had found the Messiah. We may have a bit of insight into what it was they had witnessed when Jesus called Nathaniel. A word of knowledge from Jesus about Nathaniel’s time alone in prayer earlier that day convinced him that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (John 1:46-49).

If someone notices something about your life, could you say, “Come and you will see”? Has there been enough quiet communion with your heavenly Father that your life evidences a visible difference? If someone did come to stay with you, what would he or she witness? Is the life of Jesus manifest in your mortal body? (2 Corinthians 4:10)

Prayer: Lord, help me to take the time with You so that I might be transformed. Conform me to Your image. Be my very life by the power of Your Spirit.

## 3/31 John 2:17

*17 His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”*

All four Gospels describe a similar event, but John tells us this happened upon Jesus’ first visit to the temple during His ministry. The other three Gospels tell us of a cleansing of the temple during Jesus’ last Passover. It appears that Jesus did this twice, during His first and third year of ministry, and there is no reference in any of the Gospels to a similar cleansing during Jesus’ second year. I assume the priests had backed off on allowing the trade that was so lucrative for them but then decided to reinstate it.

John is the only one that tells us that the disciples called to mind a verse from a messianic psalm, Psalm 69:9. Jesus would later predict that the temple would be leveled, so why would He be upset by what was going on there?

The temple was a type of a heavenly reality. It spoke of atonement, justice, and mercy. The temple foreshadowed the atonement the Messiah would bring, but it was also symbolic of the bride of Christ, who would replace it. Instead of clearly conveying the symbolism, the temple had become a place for merchants to engage in merchandizing and financial profiting, an abuse of what God had asked of His people. Does that happen in the present day house of God?

Jesus was fiercely passionate that God’s house, His bride, be pure and expressing love for Him rather than love of money. Zeal can also be translated “jealousy.” Jealousy for believers’ love consumes Jesus. After all, just as people could see the improper motives of the priests discredit their faith, so today the world sees the people who call themselves Christians but devote themselves to something other than their relationship with Jesus.

Remember: This passionate display by Jesus was not simply anger. It was a revelation of the Lord’s desire that each of us love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

## 4/1 John 3:13

*13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.*

A respected leader of the Jews named Nicodemus had come to Jesus to learn more about Him. Jesus immediately told Nicodemus that one must be born again. Jesus knew that the leaders of Israel did not accept Him as the Messiah and were not willing to hear His message. But Nicodemus was different. Jesus told him the reason that he should hear the message. Jesus was from heaven. No one else enjoys unhindered communion with God (John 3:34).

This statement was also a declaration of Jesus claiming to be the Messiah. First, Jesus used the title “Son of Man” in connection with ascending. That is a direct reference to Daniel 7:13-14, a passage about the Messiah, who will reign forever. Proverbs 30:4 is another ascension passage. It asks, “Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the *wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son’s name? Surely you know!”* The One who ascends to heaven and comes down is the Creator’s Son!

As a scholar of the Scriptures, Nicodemus would have clearly understood the claim Jesus was making and would have known these passages to which Jesus was referring. Jesus added one more Scripture reference. He referred to the serpent being lifted up on a pole by Moses to heal the Israelites of venomous snakebites (John 3:14-15). Jesus said that He, too, would be lifted up to give eternal life to those who believe on Him, saving them from the deadly bite of the old serpent, Satan. It was a very difficult thing for Nicodemus to receive. However, when Nicodemus saw Jesus’ words come to pass, he knew what Jesus was teaching was from heaven.

Consider: This is the great difference in religious teaching around the world. The only One to ascend and descend to give us heaven’s solution to our condition is the Son of God.

## 4/2 John 3:17

*17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*

America’s most influential export is agnostic secularism that is hostile toward the gospel. Its proponents come unglued when they hear the words “sin” or “hell.” They believe the teaching of Christianity is a perversion of the words of Jesus. They would gladly accept the first of our verses for today, but would suggest to us that other peoples added the second. In their mind, if there is a heaven, we are all going there, with the possible exceptions of Hitler and Mao.

Our loving God sent Jesus to rescue us from certain judgment. All that is required is our believing faith in Him. But when we do so, we acknowledge that He is our Creator and we should be subject to Him. That is the reality that those who oppose the gospel so vehemently resist. They believe the only way to be fulfilled is to live out one’s passions. Jesus came to deliver us from enslavement to destructive passions so that we could find real life.

John is telling us that we are condemned to certain and deserved judgment. God sent Jesus to save us from that judgment if we place our faith in Jesus. He bore our judgment for us and gives us His righteousness so that we might escape the wrath of God and live forever in His presence. This is not an exclusive faith that shuts others out, but an inclusive faith that invites all in. The fact that evil is in the world is unquestionable. The question we should ask is this: “Is Jesus God’s provision to deal with the evil in us or was He just a good man?”

Consider: The way we answer that question will make all the difference in our lives right now and forever.

## 4/3 John 4:42

*42 They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”*

Jesus stopped to rest at a well in Samaria while the disciples went to buy food. While He rested alone there at midday, a woman came out to draw water. Jesus’ words convinced her that He was the Messiah. The Samaritans, like the Jews, looked forward to a coming Messiah. She ran to the nearby village and told everyone that this man at the well must be the Messiah, for He told her all that she had done.

The Samaritans came out to see Jesus for themselves and invited Him to stay for a while in their town. This must have made the disciples very uncomfortable because Jews believed the Samaritans were evil and evil could enter into a person through touching things they had touched. After a few days, the Samaritans in that village were convinced that Jesus was indeed the Savior of the world.

Most Jews were still reluctant at that time to call Jesus the Messiah, but these despised people of a mixed race were already calling Him the Savior, not just of Abraham’s descendants, but of the world. Why is it that the least in the eyes of the world seem most ready to see Jesus for who He really is (1 Corinthians 1:26)? Could it be that they have less pride getting in the way?

Consider: God delights in giving hope to the widows, orphans, and those that society sees as insignificant. Do you?

## 4/4 John 5:2

*2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades.*

The Sheep Gate was one of the entrances to the Temple Mount through which people brought sheep for sacrifices. Some critics of the Bible said this pool must have been an invention of John’s imagination to coincide with the five books of Moses. An archeologist did discover this pool, or I should say pools, as it was two rectangular pools divided by a dam. The fifth colonnade was over the dam. The upper pool held water from a spring and slowly released it into a lower pool, which was for Jewish ritual cleansing (*mikva’ot)*. This was near the traditional location of Jesus’ grandparents’ home.

It was believed that an angel stirred the water of the upper pool and whoever entered it first would be healed. A great number of afflicted people waited for their chance. Among them was a paralyzed man who had been there a long time. Perhaps Jesus had seen him during visits to His grandparents. Jesus went to the pool and, out of all those who were sick, approached this one invalid. Jesus told him to take up his mat and walk. The man was instantly healed. The Jewish leaders were angry with Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. This took place during the second Passover of Jesus’ ministry.

Archeological discoveries continue to disprove the doubters. The Bible records accounts of actual people that lived in real places, and it has details that are verifiable, such as these five covered colonnades. We believe by faith, but our faith is not disconnected from reality. We witness changed lives. Historical accuracy of the Bible is verifiable. The documentation is abundant. To believe or not to believe is a choice. Many people will choose not to believe simply because they do not want to submit to Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, please help my life to demonstrate the joy of choosing to follow You, so that others will see following You for the wonderful privilege that it is.

## 4/5 John 5:22-23

*22 “The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.”*

Here, once again, we find Jesus making claims that would sound like lunacy coming from anyone else. First, He claimed that all judgment about right and wrong in every life is His to make. Those who believe in Jesus are very glad that this is so. He is the One that said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). He has walked in our shoes and knows the struggles we are facing. Even more comforting is the fact that He was willing to take our sins and give us His righteousness. He judges us on His resume, not ours, if you have made that exchange.

The second claim was that if you don’t honor Him you don’t honor God. That implies that Jesus’ message and deeds are consistent with God’s. That is what He claimed in the verse preceding our verses for today (John 5:19). Everything He did and said perfectly represented God. He was claiming oneness with God the Father.

No one ever spoke like Jesus. No one ever performed the miraculous signs that Jesus demonstrated (John 5:36). Whose words can calm a storm? Who can speak to deformity and paralysis and see it instantly made whole? Whom do demons instantly tremble before and refer to as “the Son of God?” Who has walked out of His own tomb after being dead for days without the intervention of man? Who do you say that He is?

Consider: Do you believe He is God’s provision for your sins? Have you accepted Him as the Lord of your life?

## 4/6 John 5:39-40

*39 “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”*

Just reading the Bible is not enough to attain eternal life. Jesus was talking to people who studied Scripture and memorized large portions of it. The way to life is found in those pages, but life is not simply knowing the words. Life is to know Jesus. Scriptures’ purpose is to introduce us to Jesus. He opened the Scriptures to the two on the road to Emmaus and showed them that the Law and the Prophets were about Him and what He would accomplish (Luke 24:25-27). The purpose of those Scriptures is for us to understand Jesus’ life and all that He means to us (John 5:46).

No wonder Paul wrote that the letter kills but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6). Many brilliant men have devoted their lives to studying the Scriptures and yet never came to Jesus to have life. The letters on pages do not look us in the eyes and convict us of our desperate need to know Christ’s death as our substitution unless we allow the Spirit access to our hearts. Every time we open our Bible we have a choice to just either read words or to come face-to-face with Jesus.

I’m glad you are reading these devotional thoughts, but my desire for you does not end there. My intent is that you develop a hunger to meet Jesus in the Scriptures and in coming to Him have life. Set aside a regular time alone with the Bible and invite Jesus to speak to you personally. Then pray about what you just read and let Jesus apply it to your life. Lift up your eyes, look into His eyes, and hear what He has to say to you. That is life!

Consider: Do I love Jesus enough to take time with Him each day and allow Him to speak to me?

## 4/7 John 6:35

*35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”*

One of the many “I am” statements of Jesus in John’s gospel is, “I am the bread of life.” Once again Jesus makes a radical promise to those who would come to Him. It’s a claim that no one else would dare to make. When we see the biblical context, it is even greater. It was God Almighty who took care of the hunger and thirst of the Israelites during their wilderness journey to the Promised Land (Nehemiah 9:15). The way He satisfied need for food and water was a physical picture of God meeting the hunger and thirst of our souls.

The prophet Isaiah wrote a prophetic song about the servant of the Lord, who we now know to be Jesus. Isaiah predicted that when the Messiah comes, the people who follow Him will no longer hunger and thirst (Isaiah 49:9). Jesus is deliberately using the same terminology to declare that He is the Messiah. He is the One who can provide for the hunger and thirst for our souls if we will follow Him.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus promised that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness would be satisfied (Matthew 5:6). If we put that Beatitude together with our verse for today, we see that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will come to Jesus and have their spiritual needs met to the satisfaction of their soul. Our souls have an appetite. It can be for the temporal or the eternal. It can be for righteousness or the abuse of created things. Has your soul found satisfaction in following Jesus? It will never find lasting satisfaction in anything else.

Consider: What does your soul hunger and thirst for today? A hunger and thirst for righteousness is a gift of God’s mercy. Will you ask God to bless your soul with that supernatural hunger and thirst and then pursue it with all your heart?

## 4/8 John 6:37

*37 “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”*

The previous passage told us that if we come to Jesus, He will be sufficient for our spiritual hunger and thirst. In our verse for today, Jesus promises that whoever comes to Him, He will never turn away. You can’t be too bad for Jesus. He’ll receive whoever comes. He loves you right where you are, but He loves you so much He won’t leave you where you are. He’ll begin to transform you. That is a process that takes time. Immediately upon coming to Jesus, your sins are covered and God sees you as if you’d never sinned. You will keep sinning, perhaps not intentionally, but nevertheless, you aren’t the finished product yet.

If you sin a little too much, will Jesus give up on you as a hopeless case? I believe the word “never” here in this verse means never in all eternity. My earthly father used to stress that it was important for me to finish what I started by cleaning up after myself. Do you think God is any less capable of finishing the work He began in us (Philippians 1:6)? If I say that I am too difficult for God, I’m denying His unlimited capabilities and power. We must cling to the promise that He will never cast us out, then get back up and gratefully try again to walk as He walked by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul predicted that some would see this lavish grace of God and say, “Why not sin so grace might abound?” (Romans 6:1). But a heart that has come to Jesus and received His love and grace longs to be free of sin. While temptations may entice us and even trick us, the love of Christ convicts us and continually calls us to walk closer to Jesus’ side. We look at the cross and remember that great display of love. We repent. Jesus picks us back up, and we begin again with renewed love and desire to be completely His.

Remember: Don’t give up when you stumble. Receive the conviction and grace. Love Jesus even more because of it, and fight on!

## 4/9 John 6:44

*44 “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”*

The people listening to Jesus began to grumble because Jesus claimed to have come from heaven. They knew His parents and His brothers and sisters, but they didn’t know about His virgin birth. Jesus told them to stop their grumbling and added our verse for today. The verse shows us the reality that Jesus understood, a reality the listeners could not comprehend. You can’t come to Jesus by reason alone. God must draw your heart to Him at that perfect time in your life. If God isn’t drawing you, you won’t be able to receive what Jesus said. Those skeptic professors who sit around and try to decide with their limited knowledge which sayings in the Bible actually came from Jesus would reject this verse. The verse tells us why their endeavors are useless grumblings.

It isn’t that God randomly chooses to draw some and reject others. We are all sinners (Romans 3:23). Jesus said when He would be lifted up, which meant crucified, He would draw all men to Himself (John 12:32). He draws us all at some point in our lives. We either accept the wooing of the Holy Spirit and come to Jesus, or we reject it, harden our hearts, and join the grumblers. Those who reject the drawing from God’s cords of love resist this with their minds by making excuses to justify their choice.

We have seen that Jesus promised those who come to Him will be satisfied and never be cast away. Now we see another promise. They will be raised up on the last day. Jesus said He would raise our bodies. Our spirits will be with Him when we die (Philippians 1:23), but on that last day He will transform our physical elements into eternal bodies to house our spirits (Philippians 3:21).

Consider: Do you remember when you realized Jesus was drawing you unto Him? Watch for that moment in others’ lives so that you can be available to encourage them to make the right choice. Let them know about these promises.

## 4/10 John 7:24

*24 “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”*

Our world today loves to quote one Scripture: “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Matthew 7:1). The point of that passage in the Sermon on the Mount is that the standard we apply to others will be applied to us. Jesus is not telling us to be tolerant of sin or that truth is relative. In that very statement many love to quote, there is an implied right and wrong. It is wrong to judge others of the very things of which you are guilty. It is wrong to overlook your own faults and focus on those of others.

In today’s selection Jesus tells us to make judgments, but not simply according to how things appear. To make a right judgment we must consider our own prejudices along with all the circumstances involved. Then we must listen to the heavenly Father, who knows all the factors we don’t know. Jesus declared that He judges according to what He hears from the Father (John 5:30). He added that His judgment is just because He seeks the Father’s will and not His own. To be completely impartial we must set aside any personal agendas we may have. Only then can we reach a right judgment.

Far from God calling us to never have an opinion regarding sin, He tells us to judge, but to judge rightly. That necessitates knowledge of God’s Word and spiritual ears that are open to hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit. There is right and wrong. There is good and evil. The culture’s denial of reality is a symptom of its godless condition.

Consider: Though we have the empirical evidence of so many lives destroyed by overindulgence and hedonism, our culture insists that to call something sin is to be intolerant. The world is becoming intolerant of truth.

## 4/11 John 7:31

*31 Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, “When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?”*

John the Beloved has an emphasis on signs in his gospel. The first sign was the turning of water into wine (John 2:11). The second sign was the healing of an official’s son at the word of Jesus (John 4:54). Various other signs appear throughout the gospel (John 6:2; 6:26; 7:31; 9:16; 11:47; 12:28-30; 20:30). Perhaps the people were equating the miracles of Jesus with the signs that Moses gave to show that he was the promised deliverer (Exodus 4:1-9, 16; Deuteronomy 18:15; John 6:14).

Indeed, what more could He have done? He fulfilled the words of Isaiah in giving sight to the blind and causing the lame to walk (Isaiah 35:5-6). He raised the dead (Luke 7:14-15)! He commanded the wind and the waves (Mark 4:39). He walked out of His own tomb after men had done the worst they could do to Him (Luke 24:5-6). What else would we have Him do to show that His words are the very message of God?

I’ve heard arguments that others performed miraculous healings in those days. Really? Where is the record of them? There are a couple of stories of miraculous healings but nothing that even comes close to the accounts we have of Jesus’ ministry. Numerous times it is said that He healed all who came to Him (Matthew 8:16). Those who reject the gospel must believe that the men who wrote the record, men about whom many historians make mention, were all liars or that Jesus was the greatest fraud to have ever lived. It is a deliberate choice to reject the gospel once it has been read and considered. One of the greatest witnesses we can give to others is to put the story of the eyewitnesses into their hands and challenge them to read and consider it.

Consider: The Pocket Testament League provides the gospel of John to all who would like to distribute it. Why not have some on hand to give to those to whom the Holy Spirit prompts you to give it? (See ptl.org.)

## 4/12 John 8:12

*12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). Before that, there was only God. He first made space (heavens) and matter (earth). Then God said, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). God was going to reveal Himself to the living beings He was about to make through the wonder of the world that He was creating. (Romans 1:20). For those beings to perceive the revelation, they needed a medium through which it would be conveyed. God chose light to be that medium. Light bounces off objects and hits our eyes. It stimulates nerves in our brains by which we perceive color and shape and thereby identify objects. Seeing is not our only means of appreciating creation, but for those who have sight it is the chief means.

John’s gospel begins by telling us that Jesus is the light of God who has come into the darkness of this world, but the darkness does not comprehend it (John 1:7-10). In our verse for today, Jesus compares Himself to light. Just as physical light is the main means by which we see the revelation of God in creation, Jesus is the spiritual light that reveals the glory of God in the spiritual realm. We see the love and grace of God, as well as the perfect example of a holy life, in Jesus. If we follow Him, we have spiritual light for our spiritual journeys.

Jesus is the light of life. Just as there would be no life on earth if there were no physical light, so without Jesus there is no spiritual life. Jesus set before us a very clear choice. We can follow Him and have spiritual clarity and spiritual life or we can walk in darkness and stumble without the light of spiritual life. Everyone who has ever lived must make that choice.

Consider: The earth was void and without form until there was light (Genesis 1:2-3). So also is the life without Christ. Live in His light.

## 4/13 John 8:34

*34 Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.”*

Sin enslaves us. This is easy to see in drug addicts and those who view pornography, but not as easy to see in many other less visible sins. Pride and selfishness are perhaps the two most common sins. While some make no effort to hide their enslavement to these sins, others go to great lengths to appear free from them, which is actually an expression of their enslavement. For example, a prideful person may perform a very menial task when others are watching so as to be sure everyone respects him or her for humility. This person would never perform the same task if no one was there to see the deed.

One way to recognize our own sins is to pay careful attention to our thought lives. The sins that enslave us will be regularly on our minds. We look to those things for satisfaction instead of looking to our relationship with God. The transformed mind will be meditating on the Word of God and a relationship with Jesus.

Another way to recognize our own sins is to look at what we do when we are alone. How do we spend those moments when no one else is around? One more way to see what is in our hearts is to listen to our own speech. Our speech comes from our hearts. We may carefully think of how to say something so as not to reveal our true nature, but eventually it comes out in the things we say. When Jesus said that He came to set the captives free, He was referring to liberating us from our captivity to sin (Luke 4:18).

Consider: Are you living in the freedom that only Christ can give?

## 4/14 John 8:43

*43 “Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.”*

Jesus very clearly told His audience that He had come from God. He told them that they were enslaved to sin, but if they received His words they could be free (John 8:31-32). The people insisted that they were descendants of Abraham and were free. They accused Jesus of being from an illegitimate relationship. Jesus bluntly told them that their father was the devil. Jesus leveled with them in an attempt to get them to see their true condition. In return, they slandered Him. Jesus clarified the situation in our verse for today—they couldn’t understand what He was offering them because they could not bear to hear the truth about themselves.

Christians face the same struggle today when they try to communicate with unbelievers. If we tell unbelievers that they need to repent of their sins and receive Jesus’ gracious gift of forgiveness, they suddenly can’t understand us. On the one hand they will admit they have done things they knew were wrong. On the other hand they often will not acknowledge the need for forgiveness from a holy God to whom they are accountable. Like the Jewish audience with whom Jesus was speaking, they can’t bear to hear our words. That is why they can’t understand the simple and clear message of the gospel.

Most people will readily admit they see decline in the American culture from the point in time when the Bible and prayer were taken out of schools. If we try to point out the connection, however, suddenly they can’t understand our words. The unbeliever interprets statistics and other factual information in a way that is disconnected from any spiritual connotations. Why is that? That can’t bear to hear the truth because it teaches the need to submit to God.

Consider: Only the Holy Spirit can break through to a heart that refuses to hear. Prayer must accompany our verbal witnesses if we are to successfully convey truth.

## 4/15 John 8:58

*58 Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”*

Jesus had told an unreceptive crowd that they were of their father the Devil. They told Jesus that they believed He was demon possessed. They claimed that Abraham was their father. Then Jesus told them that if they were children of Abraham they would listen to Him, for Abraham had rejoiced to see Him. The crowd answered that this was impossible because Jesus wasn’t even fifty years of age. Jesus’ response is our verse for today. It is one of the numerous “I am” statements of Jesus.

When Moses met with God at the burning bush, God declared His name to be “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). God isn’t in the past or the future but is always present, transcending time. The crowd was right to understand Jesus’ statement to be a claim to being God; therefore, not believing Him, they picked up stones to stone Him to death for blasphemy.

Abraham did meet with Jesus when God made a covenant with Him (Genesis 15:17-19), and when He came to his tent on the way to Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:1). The Jews were struggling with the idea that the Messiah could be God and man. Jesus was trying to help them by reminding them that God in human form was not a new thing. While they claimed Abraham as their father, they forgot that Abraham had met a man who was the *Lord*. Many Jews and Muslims still struggle with this same problem and both claim Abraham as their forefather.

Consider: Jesus was very clear in declaring Himself to be all God and all man. How else would God clearly show us that He understands our condition and has provided redemption for our sins? Could God demonstrate His love to a greater extent than taking the punishment we deserve? Go to Him in prayer and thank Him for revealing the greatness of His love for you.

## 4/16 John 9:6-7

*6 Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud 7 and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.*

Jesus and His disciples were probably just outside the temple when they noticed a man who had been blind from birth begging for alms. The disciples asked whose sin cause his blindness, his or his parents. Jews believed a baby could sin in the womb before he or she was born. Jesus said it was neither, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. Jesus was illustrating the fact that He is the light of the world (John 8:12), a declaration He had just announced.

Jesus put mud on the man’s eyes and sent him to wash it off in the pool of Siloam. When workers were excavating a sewer line in Jerusalem recently, they discovered that same pool. They also discovered a wide stairway with a drainage ditch beneath it that led up to the Water Gate of the temple. The blind man would have gone down those very stairs. When the blind man washed the mud off, he could see. The physical connection of light stimulating the cells in his eyes along with the optic nerve taking the image to the brain and even the understanding of the images was all made instantly whole by Jesus. This illustrated what Jesus does for the spiritual vision of those who come to Him.

The people referred to this as another sign (John 9:16). They believed that only the Messiah could heal the eyes of one who was born blind. The Pharisees had to find fault with Jesus because they did not want to believe He was the Messiah. With the evidence staring them in the face (now that the formerly blind man can see), they decided to not believe and used the excuse that Jesus had healed the man on the Sabbath to reject Jesus’ sign.

Consider: If one does not want to believe, he or she will find an excuse even when the evidence is clear. Do your eyes see?

## 4/17 John 10:4

*4 “When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”*

While walking down the hill on which the Israelites so long ago faced the Philistine army and Goliath, we observed two shepherds, each with his own flock of sheep. The shepherds met and talked for a moment and then went off in different directions. The two flocks had become one large flock, but each shepherd made his own unique call to his flock and the one flock turned back into two. The sheep knew the sound of their shepherd’s voice. Neither shepherd stopped to make sure he hadn’t lost any sheep. Experience had taught them that their sheep know their voices and that the sheep follow their shepherd.

The shepherds bring their sheep into a pen or safe area for the night. Near a town you may find a large pen in which a number of flocks are kept all together. A shepherd can call out his own sheep from among the others. He spends all his time with them, so he comes to know each one’s markings and habits. Each one has a name.

Jesus calls us out from among the gathering of sheep to follow Him. The world is a dangerous place, and we need our Shepherd to keep us from the spiritual wolves and lions that would devour us. He leads us to good pasture and clean water. We have learned that His voice leads us to a good place, so we follow Him.

Consider: Have you learned His voice? Have you experienced the goodness of following Him? Do you trust that where He is leading you is for your good because He cares for you? Listen! He’s calling your name.

## 4/18 John 10:17-18

*17 “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”*

Jesus was not caught off guard and then captured and executed. He laid down His life. He demonstrated this in the Garden of Gethsemane when He said, “I am,” and all the soldiers fell backward (John 18:6). He declared it when He said that He could call twelve legions of angels to deliver Him (Matthew 26:53). Jesus chose to remain in the Garden of Gethsemane as the soldiers with their torches crossed the Kidron Valley in plain view. Jesus chose to obey the Father and drink the cup of wrath that we deserve due to our sins.

Jesus deliberately chose to go to the cross and pay our ransom (Matthew 20:28). Like a faithful shepherd guarding his sheep against a lion, Jesus stood between us and our accuser and said He would take our guilt and the penalty it deserved, which was death. The sins of all people past, present, and future, from Adam to you and me and beyond, came pouring through time and space to be heaped upon Jesus. Then came the wrath of God upon those sins during these three hours of darkness that enshrouded the cross (Matthew 27:45). Finally, it was finished.

Jesus was dead, but He had the authority to take up His life again. His body was dead but His Spirit went and preached to the souls in prison and took the keys of death and hell (1 Peter 3:19; Revelation 1:18). On Sunday morning He did take His life up again and burst forth from the tomb in which His body had lain. No one ever before or since had the authority to raise himself or herself from the dead. He rose to display an irrefutable sign that death was defeated (Matthew 12:39) and that those who place their trust in Him would be raised, as well (John 6:40).

Consider: We have seen that the words of Jesus in the mouth of anyone else would sound like insanity. Think about our verse for today. Who would dare say that but the very Son of God? Who else could carry it out but Him? "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love” John 15:9 (NIV).

## 4/19 John 10:29-30

*29 “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. 30 I and the Father are one.”*

If you have come to Jesus and know Him as your Savior, God has chosen you as a part of the body of believers that makes up the bride of Christ. You belong to Jesus like a husband and wife belongs to one another. If an earthly husband saw someone trying to take his wife away by force, he would go to any extent to stop the person. Jesus is telling us that God is all-powerful and will step in like a shepherd protecting his sheep and stop anyone from stealing you away from Jesus. You can rest secure that God will not let that happen. But that does not mean you don’t need to make every effort to deepen your relationship with Jesus (2 Peter 1:5-8). His loving care and protection should cause you to want to know Him more intimately.

“Hear O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4 literal). The word for “one” was used in Genesis 2:24 of the union of husband and wife. When Jesus said He is one with the Father, He is declaring He is one in essence and yet a separate person. The Father, Spirit, and the Son have been in complete unity throughout eternity. Here is a great mystery. They desire for followers of Jesus to be transformed into His image and bring them into Their holy fellowship (Ephesians 5:32; Romans 8:29).

Heaven is much more than we can imagine (1 Corinthians 2:9). It begins with God completing His work in us. Though we will never be all that God is, He will purify us to live in uninterrupted communion with our God and Savior, Jesus. He keeps us for the future marriage feast of the Lamb and our eternal union with Him. If you are in Christ, your future is more wonderful than you could possibly conceive!

Consider: If this is God’s plan for you, what power in heaven or on earth can stop Him from bringing it to pass?

## 4/20 John 11:37

*37 But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?”*

Jesus delayed His journey until Lazarus was dead for several days. When He arrived at His friends’ home, both Martha and Mary told him that if He had come earlier Lazarus would not be dead (John 11:21, 32). They wondered why Jesus would not come in their hour of need. The crowd wondered, as well. He had performed many amazing healings, so why not for His friend? Where is God when you need Him? Why doesn’t He show up when you call out in desperation?

This is one reason many turn away from following Jesus. They may have come to an hour of desperation and pleaded with God to intervene, but He did not. Their loved one died. The miracle never happened. The prayers seem unanswered. That kind of situation can lead to bitterness, if we let it.

In Lazarus’ case, Jesus was teaching His friends something much more important than healing on demand. They would all die one day. He was teaching them that He is the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25). To believe in Him is to never die spiritually, which is so much more important than living longer physically. Jesus raised Lazarus after he was in the tomb four days. But one day Lazarus would die again and Jesus would not physically be there to prolong Lazarus’ life on this earth. Martha, Mary, you, and I need to know that death is not the end. There is life beyond the grave. God knows when it is best to take each one of us home, and it is almost always a time we think is too early. Why should we expect God to do what we want when He knows what is best? We forget that God is constantly answering our prayers in countless ways. Yet, one prayer answered in a way we do not like, and suddenly we are angry with Him for doing what He knows is best for us all. Trust Him. Believe He knows what is best even when we do not understand.

Prayer: Lord, when crisis comes to my life, help me to trust that Your answer is best. When crisis comes to my family’s and friends’ lives, help me to be Your comforting presence beside them.

## 4/21 John 12:7

*7 Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.”*

Mary had seen Jesus call Lazarus back from the dead. She had sat at His feet and heard Him teach. She knew in her heart that He was the Messiah, so she took nard, a spice used to anoint a king, and anointed His feet with it. She used her hair to wipe the excess off. It was an extravagant act of worship! Though she may have had it on hand to cover the smell of decay so that she could visit her brother’s tomb, it was no longer needed for that purpose. Jesus had changed everything, even the meaning of death.

Judas was upset because the nard was worth a year’s wages. He rebuked her for what He saw was a waste. He suggested it could have been sold to help the poor. His clever speech hid the fact that he was only interested in pilfering what he could get for himself.

Jesus told Judas to leave her alone. It was for the day of His burial. The words “my burial” may have come as a shock to Mary. I wonder if she recalled Jesus telling her He is the Life (John 11:25). The women did follow through and brought prepared spices on the morning that Jesus rose from the dead (Luke 24:1). Was Jesus leading them to a surprise meeting? The truth of Him being “the Resurrection and the Life” was about to be made abundantly clear to them.

Consider: Sometimes we are like Mary, doing something we don’t fully understand but knowing we are led to do it. The results may be confusing at first, but in God’s time all things will become clear.

## 4/22 John 12:23-24

*23 And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”*

When the Greeks who had come to worship at Passover asked to see Jesus, He knew his time had come. For the gospel to go into all the world, Jesus knew He would first have to be rejected by the Jews, die for the sins of the world, and be raised again. Jesus’ vision was much bigger than being the king of the nation of Israel. He could see that He would reign in the hearts of people around the world. But He also knew it would not be all people. It would be a select group, those that would follow Him even when it meant to a cross (John 12:25-26).

Jesus could see that the product of His sacrifice would be others who were willing to sacrifice this life and all its pleasures. They would follow Jesus and bring glory to God by showing sacrificial love to the world. It would be love that would draw others to follow, as well, giving up everything to go wherever Jesus leads. If we wonder why we are not fruitful, we may find that it is because we have not died to ourselves.

Realizing the cost of the sacrifice Jesus was about to make, He asked that the Father’s name be glorified. For the second time recorded in Scripture, an audible voice came from heaven. On this occasion the voice declared, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again” (John 12:28). Glory is the outshining of the eternal nature of God. When Jesus laid down His life for us, He clearly demonstrated the love of God. When we die to ourselves and follow Jesus, others see God’s grace and love expressed in our lives, as well. God continues to glorify His name in the lives of His servants.

Consider: Will you die to yourself that the glory of God may be seen in your life?

## 4/23 John 12:43

*43 For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God*.

Although these religious leaders believed Jesus was the Messiah, they wouldn’t confess that He was for fear of being put out of the synagogue. They were afraid the Pharisees would no longer allow them to participate in the affairs of their community and in Sabbath worship. It would mean their community would shun them. There will always be a stigma attached to being a serious follower of Jesus. Belief that leads to salvation must be followed by confession (Romans 10:9-10).

The stumbling block for these leaders was their concern for the opinions of man. They loved the glory that comes from man, which is the praise and respect that people give to those they consider to be spiritual. It wasn’t that they didn’t want the glory that comes from God, but that they loved the glory from men more. Whose praise is more important to you?

There comes a time in every believer’s life when he or she must choose. Will you confess you are a follower of Jesus, that He is the reason you live? Even pastors must decide whether or not they will be true to God’s Word and calling on their lives or if they will live for the glory and praise of man. They must choose between what is acceptable to their culture and what the Bible teaches. There are bound to be many points of stark contrast, and God will ask us where we stand.

Consider: Are you willing to value most highly the glory that comes from God?

## 4/24 John 13:3-4

*3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.*

The perspective that Jesus had only comes from God. Jesus understood that His Father had given everything into His hands; therefore, He could lose nothing. He understood that He came from God and was going back to God. That is why this world had nothing worth clinging to. With these two realities in mind, Jesus dressed in a servant’s apron. The angels must have gathered to wonder at such humility. Jews used foreign slaves to do this job, for sandaled feet that walked through the same streets that animals traveled could be quite disgusting. Can you grasp the wonder of God’s own Son washing the filth from the feet of men who were about to abandon Him?

Yet, this condescension was nothing compared to what He would do the very next day when He took upon Himself the sins of humanity. I imagine the angels were more horrified than awed at that sight. The real filth in this world is sin and it carries the germs of spiritual death. No choice will ever show more humility, grace, and love than the cross of Jesus.

When will we understand that all things are ours in Jesus? (1 Corinthians 3:22) When will we see that we came from God and are returning to God? I’m not trying to put us on par with Jesus, for He is eternal and one with God. Yet these basic facts are true for every follower of Jesus. When we grasp the reality of these truths, we will be free to serve, for we will realize we can lose nothing of real value. We have everything to give—and yet we still have the greatest gift after we give it to someone else. We know where we’re from and where we’re going, so we are free to let go of the things of this world.

Prayer: Lord, please help us to see that in You all things are ours. Help us see where we are from and where we are going that we might not cling to this world but instead follow Your example of service (John 13:14, 17).

## 4/25 John 14:9

*9 Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”*

Philip had lived with Jesus for three years. The next day Jesus would be executed. Jesus had just explained that He is the only way to the Father. Philip asked for Jesus to show them the Father, and they would be content with that. Philip wasn’t ready to die; he just wanted a burning-bush experience. He was asking for a revelation of God.

Jesus explained that His life was one continuous revelation of God. To see and hear Jesus was to see and hear God. They are one in essence, while being different persons. Is Jesus saying this to Philip in a note of surprise or sorrow? Philip had heard Jesus preach the upside-down world of the kingdom of God. He had seen Him demonstrate the truth of it by healing all who came to Him, casting out demons, and raising the dead. He was now seeing Jesus’ utter lack of fear and His complete faith in the Father by going into Jerusalem and cleansing the temple one more time.

Many of us feel like Philip. We want to meet God on the mountain like Moses did. But we somehow discount the continual revelation in the Gospels, and in nature, and the revelation of the Spirit in our daily experiences. Familiarity dulls our appreciation. Wouldn’t you rather have a lifelong daily revelation than a one-time mountaintop experience? There is so much work to be done in our hearts that we need the continual work of God preparing us for eternity. Look for His work in your life today. As you do, recognize that in small ways, you are seeing the Father.

Consider: My prayer is that you are seeing Him more clearly day by day as you read these devotional thoughts.

## 4/26 John 15:5

*5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”*

When we read this passage, we first see that we must derive our lives and spiritual sustenance from the Lord. That is the main point. But there is more. Jesus is the Branch of David (Isaiah 11:1-4). A descendant was called a branch of his or her ancestor. When Jesus called the disciples His branches, He was calling them His spiritual offspring and heirs.

Because Jesus is our source of spiritual nourishment and life, we need to remain in Him to bear fruit. Fruit is the result of His life in us. It is the natural product of yielding to His life-giving Word. Fruit takes time to form. It begins with a beautiful flower. The Holy Spirit pollinates the flower and it slowly matures and ripens. Its seed of new life is within. As others enjoy the fruit of Jesus in us, the seed becomes planted in them. It’s a natural process. The invisible things of God are clearly seen by the things that are made (Romans 1:20).

The mistake we often make is trying to serve God with our own power and ideas. We are then like a branch without the cambium layer. Even the leaves will wither and fall off. Certainly no flowers will form. We must stay continually nourished spiritually from the life-giving sap that flows from our relationship with Jesus if we are to be fruitful and pass on the seed of life to others.

Remember: Without Him, we can do nothing of lasting significance.

## 4/27 John 15:24

*24 “If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father*.”

We are guilty of sin when we realize what we are doing is in opposition to our Creator. Jesus pronounced forgiveness on those who were ignorantly doing wrong (Luke 23:34). There are those who believe that God condemns people to eternal punishment because they inherited Adam’s sinful, fallen nature. It seems that this verse suggests otherwise. It is when the individual knows he or she is resisting God that God judges the person guilty. To love evil is to hate goodness.

The religious people of Jesus’ day saw and heard about miracle after miracle. John calls many of these miracles signs. They were miracles no one else ever performed along with many other miracles only done by prophets. The miracles were evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world, but the religious leaders still hated Him. In seeing the miracles, they were seeing the heart of God and confirming signs that Jesus’ message was from God. That is why it could be said that they hated the Father, as well.

We see miracles every day, God’s works of creation among other things. Science is showing us the vastness of space, the uniqueness of our planet, and the miracle and complexity of what scientists once called a simple single cell. The deeper we delve into the mysteries of the natural world, the more scientists are turning to faith. However, there are those who see the design, order, and complexity and still grasp at increasingly ridiculous explanations. It may be because they have seen and yet hate the Creator. Or it may be that the religious legalists have so poisoned their idea of faith that they refuse to consider God.

Consider: Will your life nudge the seeker toward faith or frighten someone away from it?

## 4/28 John 16:2

*2 They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.*

There are many passages about persecution in the Bible. That’s because the world can’t understand why we are different, and what they can’t understand frightens them. It is natural to attack that which you fear. The disciples would soon be upsetting the status quo in synagogues around Jerusalem. Paul turned the world upside down, causing “trouble throughout the world” in synagogues all over the diaspora (Acts 17:6). Even when the disciples would gently explain that the Jewish leaders did not recognize their Messiah, their explanation caused an adverse and often violent reaction.

The synagogue was not only the place of worship, but a gathering place to discuss affairs of the people and a place to share news. To be “put out of the synagogue” was to be dishonored by your peers. That eventually happened to all who would proclaim Jesus as the Messiah. They had to choose between being accepted by their culture or following Jesus.

The Jews who defended the traditional interpretations would feel they were serving God by persecuting this new sect called Christians. The apostle Paul, before his conversion, even thought he was serving God when he hunted Christians to kill or imprison them. When people serve a religion in which they believe they are earning a god’s favor by defending it, there is no end to the atrocities they will do in “offering service to God.” Our fellow believers around the world are experiencing this verse on a daily basis, even from religions that claim tolerance and peace. Some believers are imprisoned and others are being tortured and mutilated. There is more persecution of Christians now than at any time in church history. Most of those who are suffering will not deny the Lord, who suffered for their salvation.

Consider: Don’t forget to pray for encouragement and grace for our fellow believers who are enduring persecution from family and religious zealots.

## 4/29 John 17:11

*11 “And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.”*

The name of the Lord is the sum of His attributes. When the Bible speaks of a person’s name, such as “the name of Jesus,” it is referring to what we observe of that person’s character. In this verse Jesus said that God has given Him His name, YHWY, which is God’s very nature. Jesus perfectly shows us God as a man.

Jesus is about to go to the cross and is concerned for His disciples. He asks the Father to keep them “in His name”—in other words, that they not stray from the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). If they are kept in the name of the Lord, they will not fight over personal preference or yield to pride. Together, displaying the fruits of the Spirit, they will be in perfect unity. They will be one in their focus on Jesus and the mission He gives them.

We can see why Jesus would pray this prayer when we hear the stories of church splits today. Someone will insist on a minor doctrine and rally others to support him or her. Another will insist on certain style of music or translation of the Bible, and another on a certain method or formula. “Divide and conquer” is the most common tactic. Whether they realize it or not, they are no longer in the name of the Lord but are operating in their own names. They draw people after themselves because they believe they are right. The issues we must stand for are the essentials of the faith: who Jesus is and what He has done for us, along with the importance of the revelation of Scripture. Division over nonessentials is always wrong. We must be united around Jesus and the salvation we have in His death, burial, and resurrection.

Consider: God may lead you to move to a fellowship that is along the lines of your personal convictions, but be careful not to draw others along with you to prove your way is best. Confront false teaching that clearly denies the truth of the gospel, but discuss minor doctrines with gentleness and respect.

## 4/30 John 17:26

*26 “I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”*

In yesterday’s devotion you learned that the name of God is the nature and character of God. Everything Jesus said and did reveals the heart of God to all people. Jesus was going to be arrested in just a few hours. How could He continue to make the heart of God known to us? The cross was the ultimate revelation of the name of God. There we see God’s great love for man, His holy justice on sin, His mercy and grace for the repentant, and the extent He would go to save us. He designed all creation to bring us to this pinnacle of revelation. The cross is continuing to reveal the name of God to the world.

Notice that the purpose of this revelation is that the love God has for Jesus, the Father for the Son, may be in us. Jesus desires each of us to love Him like God loves Him. He wants God’s love for the Son to be in our hearts. But that is not all! He wants to be in us, to live in our spirits. When we love Jesus as God loves Jesus, we are of one heart and mind. We become the bride of Christ in continual communion with Him. He is our desire.

Don’t forget how this comes about. It is through the revelation of the heart of God that we see on the cross. No doubt this includes His continuing revelation of love for us in our daily lives. The more we see and receive His love, the more we are drawn to love and fellowship with Him.

Consider: Communion helps us to meditate on this great display of God’s heart. Take time to see and receive the love of God so that your love for Jesus might increase to be like that of God’s love for Him.

## 5/1 John 18:5-6

*5 They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. 6 When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground.*

To understand what took place in these words of Jesus, we must understand how the words sounded in the language they were speaking and in the culture of the time. The translation is correct, but words and names have deeper meanings. Jesus had just asked who the mob was seeking. They answered, “Jesus of Nazareth.” The name “Jesus” means the salvation of God! “Nazareth” means “the branch,” because the people of that town were descendants of King David, Jesse’s son, and expected the Messiah to be born from their family line as the prophecies foretold. The prophet called the coming one “The Branch of Jesse” (Isaiah 11:1). Now hear the answer again as the people would have: “God’s salvation of the Branch” (Jeremiah 23:5)! Surely they understood the implications of what they had just said. Jesus’ simple question had them confessing the truth.

In the language in which Luke wrote this gospel, Jesus’ responded, “I AM!” The English translators added “he” to make the reading understandable. However, in doing so, they cause us to miss the power of the declaration. When Moses met God at the burning bush, God told Moses to tell the people of Israel that His name is “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14).

The crowd just said they were seeking the salvation of God of the branch of David, and Jesus declared, “I AM!” No wonder they fell backward. Jesus wasn’t being captured; He was allowing Himself to be taken to die for the sins of the world. The long prophesied branch of David had come to be the ransom payment for our sins. God, in the flesh, was paying our sin debt so that we might come to Him and have life.

Consider: Whom do you seek?

## 5/2 John 18:28

*28 Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor’s headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor’s headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover.*

The irony of this setting is impossible to top. The religious leaders wanted Jesus executed in the most humiliating and painful way possible, so they were trying to get Pilate to crucify Him. They knew Jesus had performed many miraculous signs proving He was the Messiah. One of their number had confessed that he knew Jesus was from God (John 3:1-2). Their animosity came from Jesus calling them out for their hypocrisy. They were also envious of the crowds that listened to Jesus.

Here stood these religious leaders at the headquarters of the local Roman authority, whom they despised, trying to have Rome execute the Lord of life. Yet, they wouldn’t go into the headquarters for fear of being defiled and having to skip the Passover feast. The Passover reminded them of when God spared them from the angel of death by the blood of a lamb in Egypt. The Messiah was prophesied to be like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15). As the Messiah, Jesus was about to shed His blood as the Lamb of God to set free from sin all who would come to Him by faith (Isaiah 53:5-8). All these leaders were concerned about was not being defiled by entering a Gentile dwelling. It’s hard to imagine!

Religion without a relationship with God can lead to blind, hard-hearted duplicity. It is the spirit of self-righteousness that puts our own interests in being honored above being merciful and true. If we have chosen the path of righteousness, then self-righteousness is the pitfall that we must carefully avoid. A relationship with God should continually humble our souls, which helps us to avoid the error of self-righteousness.

Prayer: Lord, help me to live always sensitive to Your voice and corrected by Your Spirit so that I may humbly acknowledge my true condition and thereby extend grace and love to others.

## 5/3 John 18:36

*36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”*

Governor Pilate was interrogating Jesus to see if he was guilty of sedition against the Roman government. Others before Jesus had claimed to be the Messiah and had started militant insurrections. In most Jews’ minds, the Messiah would be a king as well as a spiritual leader. Pilate surely had informers who told him about Jesus. Pilate asked if Jesus was a king and why the Jewish leaders had turned Him in. Jesus’ reply was our verse for today. It assured Pilate that Rome had nothing to fear from Jesus. Jesus’ kingdom is a spiritual kingdom.

The church has had trouble in history when it forgot this saying of Jesus. The Crusades and the Inquisition are always brought up as an example of how Christianity is just as evil and destructive as other religions. The problem with that accusation is that those examples are contrary to Jesus’ teaching and therefore not true Christianity. Whenever people try to get Christians to rally to fight for an earthly kingdom, they are asking them to ignore Jesus’ instruction.

Our battle isn’t against people (2 Corinthians 10:4). The battle is spiritual and we will win it with prayer and perseverance. Our enemies are defeated by love and by our examples. The world thinks this is naïve, but the Roman Empire would fall to Christianity by those very means. We resist spiritual forces in the heavenly realms through prayer. We conquer one soul at a time through love and the Word of God.

Don’t be fooled by those who tell you that we must establish God’s kingdom by force or laws. That kind of thinking only gives our opposition a reason to speak against us. Follow Jesus’ example. Man’s reign over the earth will one day end and Jesus will rule over all.

Consider: If force were the way to deal with evil, Jesus would have used His angel army (Matthew 26:53). The time will come for force when every last soul has decided for or against Jesus (Revelation 19:11-16). Then Jesus will lead us into a battle of judgment. Until then, souls must be won by the Word of God and prayer.

## 5/4 John 18:37

*37 Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”*

Governor Pilate was trying to see if there was any substance to Jesus accusers’ charge of subversion. He was trying to discover Jesus’ motives. Was it to become a king? Jesus saved Pilate the trouble and got right to the point. He declared that He had come into the world to testify to the truth. That was the one thing all humanity so desperately needed. Even the Jews, God’s chosen people in covenant with Him, had become confused about the nature and desire of God. Sinful man could never know God without His direct intervention. God needed to come and demonstrate truth in a human life so that truth would be obvious to anyone really seeking it. Jesus’ life bore witness to the truth.

Then Jesus made one of those claims that only He can make. “Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate demonstrated his lack of understanding the moment before him by responding, “What is truth?” Truth was staring him in the face. He was not on the side of truth or he would have listened to Jesus. He was on Pilate’s side. He turned away from the witness of God that spoke directly to his soul.

At some time in every life there is a confrontation with the truth. The witness of truth brings us to a decision point. Those who are of the truth will hear Jesus’ voice in the Gospels, through His servants, or directly from the Holy Spirit. Then we must decide if we will begin by our lives and words to testify to the truth. If we begin to follow the Master’s lead as we listen to His voice, our lives will testify to the truth by our actions and words.

Prayer: Lord, please help me to consistently testify to the truth of Your love, grace, holiness and justice. Help me listen to Your voice and follow You.

## 5/5 John 19:34

*34 But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.*

According to Dr. Gary R. Habermas, there are three events in which the overwhelming majority of all Bible scholars are in agreement: (1) Jesus died on the cross. (2) His disciples believed He rose from death and (3) Jesus’ enemies believed He rose from death. One of the most accepted arguments against resurrection to explain all three of these facts is the *swoon theory*. Only a small percentage of scholars believe it is plausible. The theory suggests that Jesus did not die but was almost dead and revived after a short time in the tomb. One addition to this theory is that He was given a drug that caused Him to appear to be dead.

The problem with this theory is that full crucifixion always ended in death. In all of history only one person is reported to have survived a partial crucifixion. Soldiers could face the penalty of their prisoner if the prisoner escaped. That is why the legs were broken to assure the person was indeed dead. Jesus was already dead. The experienced soldier made certain of this by thrusting a spear into His heart.

The vast majority of skeptical scholars has no other explanation for these three facts but will not accept the possibility of resurrection because they don’t believe in the miraculous. Jesus conquered death! It was not possible for the grave to hold Him. He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). When He promises to give us life, He has the power to do it!

Consider: The world had no answer for death. Let’s share the answer we know is true so that they might know the joy of being free from bondage of the fear of death.

## 5/6 John 20:30-31

*30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

John the Beloved picked out certain miracles that Jesus performed to help the readers of his gospel to believe what John knew to be true. Jesus is the promised Messiah. He is the Son of God. Has anyone else spoken to paralysis and has not only seen the person healed but become immediately fully functional? Have you ever heard of someone touching a person whose eyes were blind from birth and having the person see and instantly understand what he is seeing? Can a normal person call a dead body back to life after the person has been dead for days? And then there is Jesus’ own resurrection miracle.

There are also the signs Jesus performed involving nature. Who can speak to wind and waves and have them instantly obey? Who walks on water or turns it into wine? Who can cast out demons with a word? Jesus of Nazareth is the only person in the history mankind who was reported to have done all these things in the sight of many witnesses.

John recorded these particular signs out of the many miracles that Jesus did to help his readers believe that Jesus was and is who He claimed to be. There were many other miracles, but these that John recorded were to help you to believe and have life in His name. That means to accept the life of God by the authority of who Jesus is. It’s not just breath and a heartbeat, but a new quality of life, spiritual life, eternal life. It’s to be born from above and to become a child of God. What else could Jesus have done to cause you to believe? His miraculous actions showed Him to be the Lord of creation.

Consider: Are you living today in the life Jesus came to give us?

## 5/7 John 21:19

*19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.”*

Peter had promised that even if all the other disciples forsook Jesus, he’d be the last man standing. But just as Jesus predicted, Peter denied Him three times (Matthew 26:33-35). Peter had now seen the risen Lord in Jerusalem on two occasions. At this point in John’s gospel, Peter had returned to fishing. Remember that when Jesus called him, Jesus told him that from now on he’d be fishing for men (Matthew 4:19).

A man called from the shore asking if they had caught any fish. Next, the same thing happened that took place the first time Jesus asked Peter to follow Him (Luke 5:5-7). When the nets were miraculously filled this second time, Peter knew the man on the shore was Jesus and swam to Him. Jesus lovingly restored Peter and challenged him to feed God’s sheep. Peter was increasingly learning the depths of God’s grace.

As Peter and Jesus walked along the shore of Galilee, Jesus told Peter that one day he would die on a cross for his commitment to Him. That must have reassured Peter that God would help him to stay faithful until death. We are right to doubt our own abilities, but we should never doubt God’s ability to keep us from falling (Jude 1:24). Then Jesus re-called Peter. When a teacher chose a disciple, he would do so by saying, “Follow me!” Peter had heard that call three years earlier. The first time Jesus filled the nets, Peter doubted his ability to follow Him (Luke 5:8), but by the second time Jesus filled the nets, Peter was learning it wasn’t about his ability. It was about God’s all-sufficiency.

Consider: Have you been re-called?

## 5/8 Acts 1:26

*26 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.*

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). One hundred twenty of Jesus’ followers gathered to pray and wait for the promise to be fulfilled. Then impetuous Peter stood up and declared that they had to replace Judas. He quoted a verse from the Psalms about another person taking Judas’ place (Psalm 109:8). There was a sense that there had to be a total of twelve as in the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:28-30). Peter told the group that it had to be someone who had been with them from the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and who had seen the resurrected Lord. That was Peter’s qualification for an apostle.

The group came up with two names, put those names on two stones, placed the stones in a jar and shook out one of the stones. Though we aren’t quite sure where Peter got his qualification list for the role of apostle, we do know why he chose from the two in this way. The people of the Old Testament era allowed the sovereignty of God to make difficult decisions for them by this method (Numbers 26:55). However, Jesus had commanded them to wait for the baptism of the Spirit. Though the one who was chosen, Matthias, was surely a good brother and witness of Jesus’ teaching and resurrection, we later see Paul call himself the apostle chosen by God (Ephesians 1:1). We hear nothing more regarding Matthias, but Paul wrote a good portion of the New Testament, gave us the essentials of Christian doctrine, and gave witness of the resurrected Jesus throughout the Roman Empire.

It is a most difficult thing to wait upon God. We have our good ideas and reasons why we should get busy while we are waiting. We can even find a Scripture that backs up our reasoning and we can pray for the outcome to be of God. But reasoning and good ideas are fruitless unless they come from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Our tendency to act before God directs us comes from our trust in ourselves. If our trust is fully in the Lord, we will wait for His direction (Isaiah 8:17).

Consider: Am I operating out of my own “good ideas” or at the leading of the Holy Spirit?

## 5/9 Acts 2:2-3

*2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them*.

A visible manifestation of God is referred to as a *theophany.* The wind and fire were visible, physical signs of the invisible Holy Spirit. Those signs were also present when Moses was on the mountain with God (Exodus 19-20) and seen by the prophets Isaiah (Isaiah 6:6) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:4, 13). The Jews were celebrating Pentecost, which included gratitude to God for giving the Law to Moses and a reading from Ezekiel’s first three chapters. While the images of God manifesting Himself in wind and fire were familiar ones to those attending Pentecost, He caused it to happen again, right before their eyes. That would certainly help them believe the message Peter preached.

An ancient Jewish tradition tells of the angels putting crowns of fire on the heads of the Israelites when God spoke the Law to Israel. In addition, the tradition says that the voice of God divided itself into the seventy languages of the world so that all heard God speak in their own language (*The Legends of the Jews*, Louis Ginsberg, 1909). While this may or may not have actually taken place, at Pentecost the Jews who knew of this legend saw it actually happening.

In the cases of both Ezekiel and Isaiah, God followed His divine manifestation by the command to deliver His message to the people (Ezekiel 3:4-5). That is exactly what believers in Jesus are to do, as well. The Spirit that came upon those prophets now indwells all who believe in Jesus. He is there to empower us to be a witness of Jesus by our lives and our words.

Consider: God’s work in Israel in the past was all leading up to the revelation of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

## 5/10 Acts 2:21

*21* “‘*And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”*

A crowd had surrounded the disciples to see the manifestation of God in wind and fire. They were hearing the disciples speak in the many different languages of those Jews who had gathered from around the known world for the feast of Pentecost. Peter’s Holy Spirit-inspired sermon, explaining what was taking place, included a quotation from the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32). Joel had predicted a day when the Spirit of God would be poured out on men and women. The quotation ended with our verse for today. Three thousand Jews repented of their sins and were baptized (Acts 2:41). This most likely took place on the southern steps of the temple as people were required to gather at 9 a.m. as part of the Pentecost celebration. If you visit Jerusalem today, you can still see those steps and the baptismal pools *(mikvas).*

The apostle Paul also quoted this verse in his letter to the Romans (Romans 10:13). While Peter explained the need to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38), salvation begins when one calls out to the Lord. It does not matter what language or culture in which we are raised. It is a matter of the heart crying out to the Creator to know the truth and to become right with God.

Just before the specific passage for today that Peter quotes from, the prophet Joel had prophesied about people seeing dreams and visions as the Holy Spirit speaks to them (Joel 2:17). Today in the Muslim world and other countries closed to the gospel, one can meet people who have cried out to know the truth and seen this promise fulfilled in their life. Their dreams and visions of Jesus have led them to Christ as their Savior. It is especially prevalent among the descendants of Abraham. I have visited the Middle East and heard the testimony of one prominent Jew and a number of former Muslims that have come to Christ in this way. The Scripture is being fulfilled in an observable way and increasingly so as the return of Christ draws near.

Prayer: We thank You, O Lord, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved! Use us as instruments, empowered by Your Holy Spirit, to draw others to You.

## 5/11 Acts 3:6

*6 But Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!”*

Peter and John were on their way into the temple to pray. A man who had been crippled since birth sat near the entrance of the temple to receive charity. Peter uttered our verse for today, grabbed the man’s hand, and pulled him to his feet. Not only were the crippled man’s muscles and nerves made whole, the man had balance and coordination to walk and leap. Here was another miracle that gave the apostles the opportunity to share the message of salvation through faith in Jesus. The result was the conversion of five thousand men and a chance to testify to the ruling Jewish council members.

The apostles were given the gift of healing and miracles to verify that their message was from God. This was a major turning point in God’s revelation of salvation, and the people needed signs to help them accept it and believe. Signs and miracles happen today, as well, in cultures that are entrenched in false beliefs. Today God’s witnesses pray for the sick and they are healed, the dead are raised, and prayers are miraculously answered. The day of miracles has never ceased, though the anointing on the apostles was for that particular time.

In our day, some teach that everyone we pray for will be healed, as if healing alone were the goal. They ignore the majority who leave in the same condition they came, claiming those people did not have enough faith. Did this lame man give any expression of faith? Peter pulled him to his feet. If we were all healed every time a believer prayed, we’d never pass from this life. I’ve seen God do wonderful acts of healing. I’ve heard testimony of the dead being raised. But I also know that in countries that know the gospel, miraculous healings only occur in a small percentage of those for whom we pray.

Consider: Pray for the sick (James 5:14). Trust God to heal whom He wills to heal. Know that God can work through an illness in a person’s life just as powerfully as He can through a miraculous healing.

## 5/12 Acts 3:24-25

*24 “And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. 25 You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’”*

All the prophets in the Bible predicted the coming of the Messiah. Peter quoted the promise to Abraham about the Messiah. “In your *offspring* (singular, i.e., one person) shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” Then Peter went on to explain that the descendant of Abraham who blesses the world is Jesus of Nazareth.

But what about all the other prophets? A millennia earlier, David was promised the Messiah would be his descendant and would reign forever (Psalm 89:29-37). He prophesied the details of the crucifixion (Psalm 22) and that the Messiah’s body would not decay (Psalm 16:10-11). About 700 B.C. Isaiah predicted a suffering servant of God would come, born of a virgin, to bear our sins, die, and see life again (Isaiah 7:14; 53:6-12). Jeremiah predicted the day when Israel would return to God with one heart and one way (Jeremiah 32:39). Ezekiel saw the transformation of the heart from the letter of the Law to being led by the Spirit (Ezekiel 11:19). Daniel predicted the Messiah’s execution for the purpose of putting an end to sin. He even predicted when the Messiah would come (Daniel 9:24-26). Hosea predicted the resurrection after three days in the grave (Hosea 6:1-2). Micah predicted the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Zechariah foresaw the triumphal entry on the donkey (Zechariah 9:9). Malachi prophesied that a prophet would go before Jesus (John the Baptist) and that Jesus would come suddenly to the temple in Israel (Malachi 3:1). We could continue with other prophecies quoted in the New Testament by the apostles.

Peter, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, was challenging the religious leaders to examine the Scriptures and see that they were fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus. The hope they had held onto for so long had come, but they did not recognize Him. The truth of Peter’s words had been verified when Peter miraculously healed the man who had been lame since birth (Acts 3:1-10). They could say nothing.

Consider: What do you say?

## 5/13 Acts 4:19-20

*19 But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”*

The same Peter who in fear for his life had denied Jesus stood boldly before the same men that had convicted Jesus and accused them of murdering the Messiah. The power of the Holy Spirit filled Peter. The solution to fear is the power of the Holy Spirit. In spite of Peter’s anointed words, the religious leaders demanded that the disciples stop preaching about Jesus.

Peter and John answered with the reply in our verse for today. Would it be right in the sight of God to listen to the rulers or to God? Their question clearly meant that the rulers were demanding that Peter and John disobey God. It was Jesus who told them to be witnesses of what they saw and heard (Acts 1:8). Peter and John said they had no choice. They had to proclaim it. The rulers were politically savvy enough to know they would be discredited if they punished them for performing the miraculous healing of the man lame from birth. They could only threaten Peter and John and then let them go.

The Word of God tells us to submit to those whom God places in authority. Peter and John exemplify a notable exception. When leaders command us to disobey God, we must obey God rather than man and trust God for the outcome. Fear of being judged by others can cause us to compromise our witnesses and miss the opportunities to testify about Jesus. Look to the Holy Spirit to give you the words and boldly declare what God has done in you.

Consider: What are the things of God that you have seen and heard? You didn’t live with Jesus during His earthly ministry, but you live with Him now. What testimonies do you have to share about the things He has done in your life?

## 5/14 Acts 4:32

*32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.*

Jews had come from distant countries to celebrate the Passover. They had discovered that the Messiah had come and they were born again. Now they wanted to understand what He taught and how to live it. The apostles began to teach what would later be known as the Apostles’ Doctrine. The people hadn’t expected to stay in Jerusalem for so long, which meant many were running out of provisions. There was a need to share wealth and possessions so everyone could remain and be taught. This would enable them to take the message back to their home countries and teach others.

Some have taken this verse to mean that the church should live communally. However, we read later in the letters of Paul that there were churches in certain individuals’ homes. They didn’t sell their homes, but they did share them for times of worship. What we have comes from God. We are merely stewards of possessions for a short time. We are responsible to use the possessions that are in our trust for the glory of God. If there is a genuine need among believers and we can meet that need, we should pray and ask God if we are to give up our oversight of finances or possessions to them.

As a pastor of a church on a main road, I can tell you that there are those who abuse the generosity of Christians. They make the rounds of the churches in the towns that they travel through so that they don’t have to spend their own money for gas and food. We must use discernment about who is genuinely in need. Being a steward of God’s possessions means we are always ready to give at God’s direction, not man’s insistence. While we should always be ready to give, we should also have discernment about who is genuinely in need.

Consider: The day will come when we will leave all worldly goods behind and give an account to God as to how we used them.

## 5/15 Acts 5:38-39

*38 “So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice.*

Peter and John obeyed God, but in doing so they disobeyed the Jewish leadership. They continued to preach that salvation could only be found in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12). They were arrested again and imprisoned. At night, an angel brought them out of the jail and ordered them to continue to preach the gospel message (Acts 5:20).

They were arrested again and brought before the council. Peter was as bold as ever, reiterating the fact that the council had killed the Messiah and that the God of their fathers had raised Him from the dead. The council was so angry at hearing this that, in spite of the miraculous jail break, they wanted to stone Peter and John.

Gamaliel reminded the council about several other movements that had stirred up the people but soon passed. If God wasn’t in the movement it would pass, too. But if God was in this movement, they had better not be found to be fighting God. It was a wake-up call to the council. They had seen Jesus crucified, but they knew His body wasn’t in the grave. These “unlearned” disciples of Jesus were preaching with power and working miracles. The religious leaders had to decide if they really wanted to risk possibly opposing God.

Consider: Movements come and go, but movements of God bear lasting fruit that cannot be denied. The world resists these movements, but no one can stop a move of God.

## 5/16 Acts 7:56

*56 And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”*

Stephen was one of the first deacons selected to make sure the practical needs of the church were met. He was also a bold witness for the Lord. When certain synagogues found they couldn’t resist Stephen’s wise defense of Jesus as the Messiah, they found false witnesses to accuse him of false charges similar to those that Jesus had faced. Stephen’s defense was a recap of Israel’s resistance to the work of God that ran through their history. He concluded that they had done it again, and this time was the worst rebellion against God. They, Jewish leaders, had killed the Messiah. Those leaders became furious. That is when Stephen uttered our verse for today. The leaders began to scream, plugged their ears, and rushed to stone him.

When Jesus was on trial, He quoted verses that declared that He would be seated at the right hand of God (Mark 14:62; Psalm 110:1). That is the place of all power and authority. The heavens opened so that the first martyr, Stephen, could see Jesus stand to welcome him home. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints (Psalm 116:15). Not only is Jesus watching each and every life, but He stands to welcome home His faithful ones.

Prayer: Lord, please help me to be faithful to the end so that I might witness what Stephen saw.

## 5/17 Acts 8:35

*35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.*

The Ethiopian eunuch was returning to his country from worshiping in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit sent Philip from a revival among the Samaritans to meet this single person on the road south. The eunuch was reading Isaiah 53. Philip asked if he understood what he was reading. The eunuch invited him onto his chariot to explain the passage. Philip explained that it was about Jesus.

Jews today and in the recent past have been taught by later rabbis that Isaiah 53 is about the Jewish people. So let us take a look at some of the things that are written and see if that is the case. In Exodus 4:22, God calls Israel His firstborn son and says they have been abused. However, a passage in Isaiah 52:13 describes a single male who was raised, lifted up, and highly exalted, but was marred beyond human semblance. That certainly sounds like the crucifixion and ascension. The Isaiah passage goes on to say that He grows up before them as shoot out of dry ground, which reflects an earlier statement in Isaiah that He is a shoot out of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1). It also says He was despised and had no beauty. He was pierced for our transgressions, His punishment brought us peace, and His wounds heal us.

Today some Jewish theologians speak of vicarious atonement and assert that their suffering has helped the world. Can a person who carries his own sin suffer to atone for another’s sin? Even if it were possible, would it bring that person peace? The passage from Isaiah fits Christian theology much closer than recent rabbinical interpretation. This suffering One is called “the righteous One,” a term used for the Messiah, never for Israel (Isaiah 53:11).

The eunuch was convinced and was baptized. His baptism was the beginning of the Coptic church. This account took place shortly after Pentecost. These men understood this seven-hundred-year-old prophecy was about Jesus who bore their sins. The righteous One was pierced on the cross so that we might have peace with God.

Prayer: Open the eyes of the Jewish people to the wonderful truth in this passage. Lift the veil that they might turn to their Messiah and know the peace and healing You came to earth to bring to us all.

## 5/18 Acts 9:31

*31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.*

There are seasons in our individual lives and in the church, as well. Jesus’ parting words were to take the gospel into all the world, starting with Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria (Acts 1:8). The first three areas had received the message and sprouted churches in the midst of persecution. Now Saul, the leader of the persecution, had miraculously converted to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. The church was experiencing a time of peace. It was time to build up the believers. They needed to mature in their knowledge of the Lord and find their individual callings to serve, each in his or her gifts. Persecution would come again and scatter the believers to the rest of the world, but first they needed a time of being strengthened.

The believers walked in the fear of the Lord. Some believe the term “the fear of the Lord” is an antiquated idea of a vengeful God; however, it comes from the sense of the justice of God. We will all give an account of ourselves to God (Romans 14:12). God does discipline His children in love, and so, as a child obeys because his or her parents punish disobedience, in reverential fear we live to obey our heavenly Father. But equally important is that fact that those we encounter will face His wrath if they do not accept the salvation He so graciously offers them. That is why the early church was growing. They were compelled by love to share the hope we have in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:11).

It almost seems contradictory to say the believers lived in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. These two do go hand in hand. When we are walking in obedience, we have the abiding comfort of the Holy Spirit. When we are in disobedience, we lose that sense of peace and joy because the Spirit of God is convicting us of our actions. That’s when we anticipate the discipline of our heavenly Father.

Consider: Am I presently walking in the fear of the Lord and enjoying the comfort of the Holy Spirit?

## 5/19 Acts 10:19-20

*19 And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. 20 Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.”*

Peter had just seen a vision of a great sheet filled with unclean animals let down from heaven. A voice from heaven had told him to kill and eat them. Peter replied that he would not eat the unclean. The voice told him that what God had cleansed Peter should not call common. It happened three times. The disciples had only brought the gospel to the Jews and Samaritans. God was showing Peter that the gospel was for the whole world.

At the same time, a Roman centurion had been praying and seeking the truth. God sent an angel to tell him to invite Peter to come to his home. The centurion sent the three men mentioned in our verse for today to find Peter. The Spirit told Peter to not hesitate to go with them. The result was that all the Gentiles in the centurion’s home were saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. The church began to get the message.

Did you notice that God spoke to these people in multiple ways? He put Peter into a trance and caused him to hear a voice. He inspired Peter’s thoughts as Peter pondered the vision. The Holy Spirit spoke to Peter’s mind to go with the men. In the case of the centurion, he allowed him to see an angelic messenger and hear his voice. The church heard of the events and recognized they were revelations from God (Acts 11:18).

God has not changed. He still speaks to men and women. What He speaks must be consistent with His Word, for God will not contradict Himself. What Peter heard was consistent with the prophet’s writings. The Messiah was to be a light for the nations (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6).

Consider: God speaks to us through His Word, but He has many other ways to speak to those who seek Him. We must know the Word to discern if the messages we receive are from God or from another source.

## 5/20 Acts 12:14-15

*14 Recognizing Peter’s voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. 15 They said to her, “You are out of your mind.” But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, “It is his angel!”*

Peter had been imprisoned by the religious leaders. There were four squads of soldiers watching his cell. He slept chained to two soldiers. In the middle of the night an angel helped Peter with what I like to call a “Holy Spirit jail break.” Peter thought the angel was a vision at first. He went to John Mark’s mother’s home, where a prayer vigil was being held for Peter’s safety.

A servant girl named Rhoda went to see who was at the door. When she heard Peter’s voice, she was so excited she left the door locked and went to tell the others. They thought she had heard Peter’s spirit. Isn’t it strange how we can be praying for something and not recognize the answer has arrived? We are on our faces pleading with God and God is trying to get us up to see that He has already answered us.

When you pray in faith, watch for the answer to come. Expect it to come. It may not come in the way that you imagine, so be open to whatever way God may decide is best to answer you. You can know that His way is the best way, even when you don’t understand. God broke Peter out of jail, but He left Paul in jail to write the epistles that have helped the church for two millennia.

Prayer: Lord, help me to expect You to answer, but also to accept the answer You give me, knowing it comes from Your gracious heart.

## 5/21 Acts 13:10

*10 “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?”*

These are the words of Paul to the magician Elymas. The proconsul of the island of Cypress, Sergius Paulus, had asked for Paul and Barnabas to share the gospel with him, but Elymas kept opposing them. Opposition to the gospel is to be expected. Some who hear it are afraid they will lose control of their lives or their influence over others. The Holy Spirit had Paul use the harsh words in our verse for today to silence Elymas. Elymas became blind for a time, which was a physical manifestation of his spiritual condition. This convinced Sergius Paulus to believe Paul’s message.

Up until the conversion of the proconsul, Paul had been using his Hebrew name, “Saul.” From this point onward he took the Roman name of the proconsul, “Paul.” We rarely see such a harsh response to opposition in the New Testament. It was obviously what the Spirit deemed necessary for the conversion of the proconsul and a testimony to the island.

We often try to formulate how one should witness. I haven’t read many formulas that included cursing your opposition with blindness. My point is that we must be led of the Spirit. Every person and situation is unique. While we should memorize the Scriptures that lead one to salvation and be ready to share our testimonies, we should also be attentive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. He is the One that wins souls.

Consider: When I share Christ, do I follow a formula or seek the leading of the Holy Spirit?

## 5/22 Acts 13:46

*46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.”*

Paul always looked for a synagogue to begin his witness of Jesus in a city. The Jews had the Scriptures, which gave them a background of morals and the words of the prophets. Jews kept the record of the one true God and His dealings with man. For that reason among others, they would be elder material for a new church. Paul was following the example of Jesus, witnessing to the Jew first and then to the Gentile.

Paul often found the synagogue leaders would oppose him. After all, their leadership in Jerusalem had Jesus crucified. Paul’s teaching was in line with much of their expectation of a Messiah but certainly not all of what they believed He would accomplish. That would take place at the Second Coming. The Jews of Paul’s day thought it would somehow all take place at once or that the Scriptures referred to two individuals who would come at the same time.

It was Paul’s turning to the Gentiles that really set the stage for an angry division. Some Gentiles would listen to Jewish teaching at the synagogue. They were called “God fearers.” Paul drew these Gentiles away and taught them that they were right with God through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. They did not need to keep the Laws of Moses, for that was a covenant with children of Abraham. The emphasis now was on walking in the Spirit. This aroused the jealousy of the Jewish leadership that often chased Paul out of town. By the time that happened, a church had already been established.

Consider: Paul proclaimed the message and defended the truth of it. Then he spent the majority of his time establishing those who believed. That is a good guideline for us all. Are you training someone in the Word?

## 5/23 Acts 14:27

*27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.*

Time for testimonies! Paul and Barnabas had been sent out by the church in Antioch at the leading of the Holy Spirit. Now they had returned and were reporting about what God was doing. This first trip was eye-opening. They learned that they would be strongly resisted by unbelieving Jews. They could report that a number of churches had been founded. The island of Cyprus had been evangelized. The proconsul there had become a believer. God had used miraculous healings and a curse of blindness on the magician that opposed them to help the message to be received. The Gentiles were ripe for the gospel.

You can imagine the church in Antioch listening with bated breath at the account of the stoning of Paul. The surely marveled at his trust in God to return to the same town on the return trip so that he could strengthen the local church. It had been an exciting and fruitful missionary trip. The church in Antioch could see the fruit of obeying the leading of the Holy Spirit and boldly proclaiming the gospel.

When your local church sends people out to serve the Lord, it’s important to have them return and tell of what God has done. It reminds us that God is still at work and that our prayers are effective. It encourages others to go out in faith and see what God will do in and through them. Pray – Send – Obey – Support – Report. That is how the church is encouraged to fulfill the Great Commission. It is in giving that we receive.

Consider: Have you considered your role in evangelizing the world? It may be prayer for specific ministries or individuals, financial support, a short-term mission trip to aid a struggling mission base, or sharing the gospel with your neighbor. Ask God.

## 5/24 Acts 15:39-40

*39 And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.*

Paul and Barnabas had stayed in Antioch for some time after giving their report. Some men came from Jerusalem insisting that the Gentile men had to be circumcised if they were to be part of the faith. So Paul and Barnabas went to see the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to settle the matter. The gathered leaders decided that the Gentiles were not obligated to obey the Jewish ceremonial law.

Then Paul and Barnabas decided to go and visit the churches they had started. Barnabas wanted to bring John Mark again. Paul refused to take him because he had deserted them on the previous mission. Instead, Paul took Silas, a man who had come with them from Jerusalem. Barnabas went with John Mark. The church in Antioch commended each team to the grace of God. The dispute resulted in a doubling of the missionary outreach.

Near the end of Paul’s ministry, he would ask for John Mark’s assistance and write that John Mark was useful for the ministry (2 Timothy 4:11). Barnabas means “encourager.” Barnabas was the one who helped Paul to be accepted by the other apostles. He was the one who found Paul in Tarshish and brought him to Antioch. In our verse for today we see him encouraging John Mark with second chance. Sometimes we need to have the faith to allow a person who has failed in the past to try again.

Consider: Do you know people who need an encouraging word and another chance to prove themselves? Pray and ask the Lord what you should do for them.

## 5/25 Acts 16:3

*3 Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek*.

Paul saw the heart of a young man named Timothy and decided to mentor him. Paul wrote a letter to Timothy to tell him to be sure to teach others to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2). That is how we multiply our efforts. Paul was exemplifying this by taking Timothy with him and letting Timothy witness how the Lord was establishing churches through Paul. We should all be watching for someone to mentor, or, if we are young in the Lord, for someone to mentor us. It is a blessed person that has a mentor and someone to mentor.

Paul saw the need to have Timothy circumcised. Paul had recently been to Jerusalem to verify the fact that Gentiles did not need to obey all the Laws of Moses, but since Timothy’s mother was a Jew, Timothy could be considered a Jew. Circumcision would give Timothy the opportunity to preach to Jews as well as Gentiles. Paul wasn’t looking for the easiest way, but the most versatile and effective way. It certainly says something about Timothy that not only was he willing to follow Paul in many dangerous settings, but he was willing to be circumcised, as well.

We could certainly use more of this one-on-one, life-sharing mentoring today. Timothy was Paul’s disciple just as the twelve were Jesus’ disciples. It takes a mentor with dedication to God and who walks in the Spirit to be a good example. It also takes a willing disciple to give up his or her time and personal desires to be taught. What would it take for you to step into one of these roles?

Prayer: Lord, please raise up godly men and women who are willing to share their lives with young men and women. Raise up young men and women who are willing to give up their lives for You, lay down their pride, and be mentored at any cost.

## 5/26 Acts 16:10

*10 And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were on their way to evangelize some major cities, but the Holy Spirit impressed on them not to preach the Word to the area they had in mind. They turned another direction, but then the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7) would not allow it. Finally, Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia asking for them to come and help. They team took this as a sign from God. This is the first time in Acts that the narrative becomes the first-person, “we.” Luke must have joined them at this point and agreed with the vision.

Luke’s account does not tell us exactly how the Holy Spirit influenced them. “The Spirit of Jesus” is simply another way to imply the leading of the Holy Spirit. They must have all been in unity on this impression. But then Paul had a vision. Again, the account doesn’t reveal how that happened. We don’t know if he had a dream, if he was in a trance, or if he was wide awake. We do know they all agreed it was the Lord’s direction. Perhaps we don’t have the specifics because we would expect God to only work in one particular way. The important thing to see in this passage is that God can influence our spirits so that together we sense the Lord’s leading. Once they knew God’s direction, they were eager to see what God had in store for them there.

Are we as sensitive to the Lord’s leading? In this passage we have an example of someone proposing but the Spirit interrupting and finally directing. Are we willing to proceed by faith as we listen for God’s affirmations or prohibitions? Paul would go to some of the areas that he had earlier skipped over on the third mission, but that was a later time and another leading. What God forbids today, He may lead you to tomorrow when the situation is ripe.

Prayer: Lord, help me to always be waiting upon You with a heart that is sensitive to Your direction so that You might be glorified.

## 5/27 Acts 16:16-17

*16 As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. 17 She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”*

This is a fascinating insight into fortune-telling and the spirit realm. We can see that this girl had what many would call “a gift.” Paul called it “a spirit.” The spirit was telling the truth. I suppose there are preachers today who would love to have someone following them around declaring that they are proclaiming the truth. However, after a few days, she had become so annoying to Paul that he cast the spirit out of her. The Holy Spirit was the only spirit they needed to help them proclaim the gospel.

The men who used this girl to make money realized their business was ruined, so they stirred up people against Paul. It is likely these men didn’t believe the girl’s gift was consistently true, or they would have listened to what she said about Paul and his team. The crowd brought Paul and Silas before the magistrates and had them beaten with canes and imprisoned.

Remember, this painful outcome occurred after Paul had the vision to go to Macedonia. They were seeking God’s direction and being obedient, yet they were suffering physically as a result. Submission to God does not exclude us from trouble and pain in this world. Nothing spares us from the results of living in a fallen world. Submission to God does guarantee us that God is with us to see us through, and assures us that troubles will ultimately serve God’s purposes. In this case, it led to a household, and probably a number of prisoners, coming to salvation.

Consider: Fortune-telling is forbidden in Scripture because it involves another spirit and is not always true (Leviticus 19:31). Even if it appears to be helpful, it will be detrimental in the long run.

## 5/28 Acts 18:9-10

*9 And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, 10  for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.”*

Paul has faced some serious persecution and is only halfway into his second missionary journey. He has been stoned, caned, imprisoned, and chased out of city after city, sometimes fleeing for his life. Now he is in Corinth, one of the most decadent cities in the world. Half the population were slaves. The Temple of Diana boasted having one thousand prostitutes. Perhaps Paul was experiencing a bit of post-traumatic stress. He would have to be some kind of superman not to have some fears that the past persecutions might repeat.

The solution for his condition was a word from God. God is sovereign over all the details of life. If He tells us not to be afraid, then there is nothing to fear. Paul knew he should never fear (Deuteronomy 31:8), yet he needed the reminder from the Lord. The Lord promised that no one would attack or harm him. Then the Lord added another incentive to continue. He had many people in that city. He promised Paul that his work would be fruitful, and it was. He stayed for a year and a half before those in opposition to the gospel made an attempt to prosecute him. When they came before the proconsul, the opposition was punished.

We can find ourselves backing away from the call of God upon our lives because of opposition or bad experiences. That is when we need a word from God. We can know what the Scriptures say, but we need to have the Lord speak to our hearts so that we know we can go on. God knows how we feel and the weaknesses of our minds and bodies. He is able to intervene when we can’t find the strength to continue (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Remember: When you are at the end of your rope and don’t see how you can continue to do what God has called you to do, wait on the Lord. Listen for His still, small voice (1 Kings 19:12). Confess your weaknesses, and ask for a word from heaven.

5/29 Acts 19:2

*2 And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”*

Paul met twelve men in Ephesus who were disciples. He asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. They never heard of a Holy Spirit. That caused Paul to question just how they had come to be disciples. They told Paul they had been baptized by John.

These men must have been powerfully influenced by their baptism and the message of John to continue for years to consider themselves disciples in a foreign land. Paul explained that John had taught to believe in the One that would come after him, which was Jesus. After they had confessed their faith in Jesus, Paul laid his hands on them and they were baptized in the Holy Spirit. They spoke in tongues and prophesied.

Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? God gives the gifts of the Spirit as He decides to distribute them (1 Corinthians 12:11). Has your life changed? Do you notice God using you in a way that is new and different from your former lifestyle? God has promised to give the Holy Spirit to those believers that ask for Him (Luke 11:13). Ask and you shall receive (Matthew 7:7).

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to yield myself completely to the Holy Spirit. Help me to obey His leading. Show me the gifts You have given me, and teach me to use them for Your glory.

## 5/30 Acts 19:20

*20 So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.*

God had given Paul such an anointing while he was in Ephesus that the city revered the name of Jesus. Diseases were healed and demons were cast out. Many of the converts put their books on magical arts in a pile and burned them. Unlike his experiences in many of the previous cities in which he had shared the gospel, Paul’s time in Ephesus enabled him to build up the church and the testimony of Jesus.

Our verse for today summarizes the results. What does missionary success look like? “The word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily”! More and more people heard the word of the Lord and it prevailed in their hearts and minds in a mighty way. The signs and wonders God did through Paul were all for the purpose of opening the ears of the Ephesians to hear and consider the Word of the Lord.

In our witness today, we need to exalt and refer to the Bible. It is the power of God’s Word that transforms hearts and minds. It strengthens us spiritually. If the devotional verse you read in this book each day is all the Word that you read, you will be spiritually malnourished. Let the Word of the Lord increase in you and prevail over your heart and mind. When that happens in the lives of a large number of people, there is revival.

Consider: Contemplate the power of the Word of the Lord. It never returns void. It accomplishes the purpose for which God sent it (Isaiah 55:11). It is the means of all created things (2 Peter 3:5).

5/31 Acts 20:12

*12 And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.*

Paul had made a stop at the church in Troas on his way to Jerusalem. On Sunday, the church gathered and Paul preached. They had met in an upper room and the many bodies and lanterns made the room warm. Paul preached on until midnight, sharing his heart before he left the next day. And you thought your pastor was long-winded! One young man named Eutychus was sitting in the third story window listening to the message when he drifted off to sleep, fell to the ground, and died. I can’t think of more depressing way to end a church meeting.

Paul ran downstairs and embraced him and told the church not to worry, that the young man was alive. Paul could now add that the dead were raised to the things the Lord had worked through him (Matthew 10:8). That made a much better ending to their time of worship. In fact, the restoration of Eutychus’s life just elevated their worship to a higher level. The service went on until dawn!

They were more than a little comforted. The word used for “comfort” is also the word used for “the Holy Spirit.” They were more than a little exhorted. I guess I could say that again, after an all-night exhortation. Exhortation and comfort and the work of the Holy Spirit all apply. What a night that was!

Consider: Think about how passionate Paul was to share his heart to this congregation that he might not see again (Acts 20:22). Pray that this passion might burn in your heart, as well.

## 6/1 Acts 20:20

*20 How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house* . . .

Paul invited the elders of the church of Ephesus to come and meet him in Miletus. He was sharing his heart with them, just as he did in Troas, thinking he would not see them again. In our passage for today, Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he boldly proclaimed everything profitable to them. He declared the whole counsel of God. He didn’t hold back from teaching those doctrines that would get him in trouble with the local synagogue or the Greek temples. He didn’t avoid doctrines they might find hard to accept.

Paul spent his time with them teaching the Word publicly and from house to house. He had public meetings but also small home meetings. Apparently, the Ephesians were hungry to learn or Paul wouldn’t have had so many opportunities. This hunger is a gift from God. Without it we will just get busy with daily life. It’s easy to avoid being taught. Those who the Holy Spirit has anointed to teach are encouraged by eager listeners who have a lot of questions.

Teachers who the Spirit has anointed are also a gift from God. They don’t find it annoying when they are invited to a home or a public opportunity to share about the Word. That is what they live to do. When God puts hungry learners with anointed teachers, there is growth in the church. Paul had delivered his soul to the Ephesian elders, and now it was up to them to yield to the Spirit and pass on what Paul had taught them.

Consider: Ephesus is uninhabited ruins today. The grandeur of the third largest city in the Roman Empire lies in dust, but the Word that Paul shared with those elders is still inspiring hearts and minds today. Value what endures.

## 6/2 Acts 20:28

*28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*

Paul was speaking to the elders of Ephesus, whom he referred to as *overseers.* The KJV translates the word as “bishop.” Paul first tells them to pay careful attention to themselves. Leadership in the church has many challenges. We desperately need humble servant leaders that follow Jesus with their whole heart. There are many temptations in ministry: pride, abuse of authority, sexual misconduct, slothfulness, and much more. The faithful shepherd will pay attention to his spiritual life first, as he cannot lead others where he is not willing to go. Accountability to other elders in the church is an absolute necessity.

Then Paul reminds the elders that it was the Holy Spirit that put them in the position of overseers so that they could shepherd the flock. It isn’t a calling one takes upon himself. A shepherd feeds the flock by guiding them to good pasture while protecting them from poisonous weeds. He leads them to places where they can be watered. He is willing to lay down his own life for the sheep to protect them from predators. All of these roles have rich spiritual counterparts.

Finally, in this verse, Paul reminds the elders why they serve in this capacity. The congregation is precious to God. The blood of Christ had purchased each member. That is what makes the sheep worth the laying down of the elder’s life.

Consider: The stress that comes from the life of pastoring puts pastors close to the highest risk level on insurance tables. Pray for your pastors and your elders. Consider how you might lighten their workload.

## 6/3 Acts 20:35

*35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*

Paul was an apostle, an official messenger of Jesus. In Corinth and Ephesus he not only labored hard physically as a tent maker (Acts 20:34), but spiritually, he labored hard, too. Night and day he was teaching the Word of God and its application to the believers’ lives. Because many of them were from Gentile pantheistic backgrounds, he had a lot to teach them about life in Christ.

This teaching was not a dispassionate lecture series, but was delivered with tears (Acts 20:31). He was more concerned about grounding them in the faith than he was about his own life (Acts 20:24). His life was the example with which he challenged the elders. How many of us would want to tell the leaders of a church, “Be like me!”? Life is short, and Paul was making up for a lot of lost time. But more than that, he wanted to convey the message of grace that had transformed him.

He challenged the elders to remember a quote from Jesus that we find nowhere else in Scripture. “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Matthew 10:8 comes close to this expression.) This giving mindset is a necessity for servant leaders. We have to have our minds adjusted to this truth that Jesus taught and demonstrated. To be able to give is a blessing if we would be Christlike leaders. How else can we lead others to know this truth if we do not live it before their eyes?

Prayer: Lord, change my thinking from “What’s in it for me?” to “How can I be a blessing?” Help me to see that it is more blessed to give than to get.

## 6/4 Acts 21:39

*39 Paul replied, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people.”*

Paul had been in the temple fulfilling a vow to show the Jews that he still respected and observed the Laws of Moses. Some of the people worshiping that day had seen Paul with a Gentile in Jerusalem and had heard that he taught Gentiles that there was no need for them to keep the Laws of Moses. Those people assumed that Paul had brought that Gentile into the temple. They began a riot, beating and kicking Paul.

The Roman fortress of Antonia had been built to give a view into the temple grounds. Upon seeing the riot, the troops came in and took Paul prisoner, keeping the crowd from killing him. But Paul pleaded to speak to the crowd. He told the captain he was from Tarsus, a Roman university city. The captain allowed him to speak, and Paul shared the gospel with the crowd that had tried to kill him.

This was a demonstration of loving your enemies. He was explaining the way of salvation to the very people who had almost killed him. He used any natural means available to obtain the privilege. In this case he took advantage of the fact that Tarsus was the place of his birth and that he also knew how to speak Hebrew. He used his own testimony, as well, even his past persecution of Christians. But when he told them of his call to the Gentiles, the crowd began screaming again and refused to hear. Their bias prevented them from hearing the truth.

Consider: Paul shows us several witnessing tips you don’t often read about. Look for opportunities even to share with those who abuse you. Use what natural means you have available to gain the opportunity. Share your testimony and anything that might help the listeners relate—but don’t be surprised if they stop listening and start screaming.

## 6/5 Acts 24:25

*25 And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, “Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.”*

In Caesarea today, there is a walkway that leads to the area that was once the pools of Herod’s palace. On that walkway you can see a square hole in the rock capped with iron bars. Below are dungeons that archaelogists recently discovered. On the wall of one of those cells is etched the name of Paul. The governor Felix knew Paul was innocent. Felix knew about the Christian faith because his wife was a Jewess. Felix was a politician. He didn’t want to let Paul go because he needed to stay on the good side of the Jewish leadership. However, if Paul would have offered a large enough bribe, he might have let him go. Paul never made the offer.

Felix was curious about the followers of the Way, who some were calling Christians. He called for Paul in order to entertain himself with theological debate. Felix had lured his wife, the granddaughter of Herod Agrippa 1, away from the king of Emesa. Paul preached on the three fundamentals truths: God is holy and is satisfied with nothing less than righteousness; man has no self-control and will always fall short of God’s standard; and a righteous and holy God must judge us for our actions. No wonder Felix was alarmed. His current wife was his third wife and he had stolen her from another man. In addition, he had ordered the slaughter of a number of Jews.

With all that on his conscience, we have no record of his conversion. As plain and as alarming as the message is, some would rather face the wrath of God for their sins than to give up their freedom to live any way they please.

Consider: Luke recorded Paul’s example of witnessing to a dignitary. Paul reasoned with Felix about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment. In the light of eternity, which of these men is greater, the governor or the prisoner?

## 6/6 Acts 26:29

*29 And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.”*

After Felix was removed, Festus took his place as governor. The Jewish leaders were still trying to get Paul to Jerusalem so that they could assassinate him. Festus was willing to move the trial to Jerusalem to please the Jews. Paul’s only chance of survival was to appeal to Caesar. It was the right of every Roman citizen to do so. Festus wanted help in writing out the charges to be sent with Paul, so he invited his guests, King Agrippa and his wife Bernice, to hear Paul.

Paul knew Agrippa was familiar with the Scriptures. He shared his conversion story and related it to the words of the prophets regarding the coming Messiah. Agrippa came under conviction and retreated by asking if Paul thought he could be so quickly converted. Our verse today is Paul’s answer. Paul’s passion was for everyone to know the Messiah’s forgiveness of sins and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Paul held no animosity towards Festus. He understood that the fallen person will always act in his or her selfish interests, yet each one of us is made in the image of God and can have that image restored.

It seems unfair that Paul would unjustly languish in prison, and it was. Yet Paul had the opportunity to witness to dignitaries, to be in communication with the church, and to write letters that still benefit us today. While the Enemy may have meant it for evil, God was using it for good (Genesis 50:20). Next, Paul would witness in Rome.

Consider: In this world you can expect injustice, but you can also expect God to be working through it for your good and His glory. Watch for opportunities to share the great things God has done for you. Do you have Paul’s passion to see even your enemies come to know the saving grace of Jesus?

## 6/7 Acts 28:3

*3 When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand.*

Paul’s many hardships remind me of Joseph’s. They were both betrayed by their fellow Jews, imprisoned on false charges, and stayed in prison for an extended time. Both found favor with their jailor. The big difference is that Joseph was exalted before his death, but Paul was exalted after his death.

In our verse for today, Paul is on his way to Rome to have his case heard by Caesar. In all likelihood, a representative of Caesar, not Caesar himself, would have heard him. Paul advised the centurion, Julius, to wait until the weather was better, but Julius took the captain’s advice and set sail. Soon a storm drove the ship and they were in danger of drowning. After a number of days, Paul saw a vision of the Lord who told him they would all be saved, so Paul encouraged all on board to eat. After running aground on a reef, they all safely made it to shore on the island of Malta. The natives there helped them warm up from the cold by building a fire. Paul helped gather wood, but was bitten by a viper as he threw the wood into the fire.

The natives were sure the bite was God’s justice upon Paul. That sounds like what some Christians today might think. But when Paul was not bothered by the bite, they began to think he was a god. This opened the door of opportunity for Paul to preach about Jesus. No doubt, the two hundred seventy-six souls on the ship also heard the gospel in its fullness. What we sometimes think is a compounding disaster can turn out to be a blessing in disguise. How often we misinterpret what is happening around us! When will we learn that our faithful God is in the midst of every situation to work through it for the salvation of souls?

Prayer: Lord, help us to see our next difficulty through eyes that believe in Your faithfulness and power. Help us see what You are doing through it.

## 6/8 Acts 28:23

*23 When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.*

When in Rome, Paul was held under house arrest. He was shackled to a soldier, but in his own rented home. People were free to visit him. He invited the local synagogue leaders over to tell them that he was not opposing the Jewish faith but declaring that the Messiah had come (Acts 28:17-20). Those leaders hadn’t received any news from Jerusalem so they decided to come again and hear what he had to say.

Paul preached a message that lasted all day. We don’t have the details of the message, but Luke records that it was about two things, the kingdom of God and Jesus the Messiah. He preached from the Law and the Prophets. The Kingdom is more than a coming day when the Messiah reigns on the earth. It is the reign of Jesus in our hearts today. We are familiar with preaching about Jesus from the New Testament, but could you present Jesus as Lord from the Old Testament? That is what Paul did all day long.

In our churches today, there is an ignorance of the richness of the Old Testament. At times a teacher might pull out a few verses to support a sermon, but he or she might at the same time largely ignore the context and flow of the texts that Paul was preaching from. Take time to learn the chronology and messianic expectation that runs from Genesis to Malachi. Not only is it helpful when sharing Jesus with those from a Jewish background, but it also gives us a clearer picture of the work of God throughout history. We must not be lazy when it comes to studying the Word of God. You can find a six lesson overview to begin your study at bible-sermons.org entitled *Understanding the Old Testament*. It would also be helpful to read of the types and shadows of Jesus in books on typology. I have written one entitled, *Jesus Concealed in the Old Testament*.

Consider: The Old Testament was the Apostles’ source text from which they preached Jesus.

## 6/9 Romans 1:11-12

*11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— 12 that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.*

When brothers and sisters in Christ meet, they should mutually encourage each other’s faith. Paul knew that Christ in Him and Christ in them would build one another up. He knew he had special gifts, but he knew that they had special gifts, too. The apostle Paul was not arrogant, as some claim. He knew he was the worst of sinners who needed the encouragement of the body of Christ (1Timothy 1:16).

I remember one particular brother who, when he saw me, would always ask what the Lord was showing me. It was an invitation to share what I was learning. Then he would add to it. We always mutually encouraged and strengthened each other. Life’s journey is difficult enough. We don’t need to lord it over one another or dwell on our differences. What we need is mutual upbuilding (Romans 14:19).

Knowing that I would be asked to share caused me to make an effort to keep in mind the things the Lord was showing me in His Word. That helped me to retain what I was learning. Whether I was more mature in the Lord than that brother who always asked me did not matter. We were strengthening one another. We were growing together in the Lord. This is so needed in the church today.

Consider: Instead of common small talk, why not begin our conversation with someone we know is in Christ with this question: “What has the Lord been showing you?” Be ready to share with others what the Lord has recently shown you.

## 6/10 Romans 1:32

*32 Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*

God gave us all a conscience. We can abuse it or stifle it, but it still tells us that there is right and wrong. Our education systems try to reprogram it. At times, personal pain is our excuse to try to justify ignoring it. Most often it is our passions that try to silence it. A friend of mine was working with a young New Age woman who insisted all life had equal value, whether a dog or a human. He asked what she would do if she saw a puppy and a baby thrown into the Grand Canyon and was only able to save one, which would it be? She hesitated for some time. Finally she said, “I’m sad to say it would be the puppy.” Why was she sad to say it if she really believed it? That is just one extreme example, but the stifling of conscience happens continually throughout the globe. We ignore the warning system God placed in us because of ideology or in pursuit of pleasure.

Once we have chosen to ignore our God-given conscience, we then must justify our actions. It’s as if we are trying to convince ourselves that there are no consequences. We are taught that conscience is a holdover from man’s stifling religions and we should ignore it and self-actualize. That is psychobabble for giving in to our lusts. Of course the proponents of such nonsense add, “As long as it does not harm others.” They ignore the overwhelming evidence that giving in to our passions always harms us and others. Part of the justification process is to praise others who practice the same type of enslavement. They are called “enlightened” because they yield to the same passions.

The only escape from this destructive cycle is life in the Spirit. We must experience a daily renewing of our minds to conform them to the mind of Christ (Romans 12:2). It begins with acknowledging that we do deserve hell for our rebellion against our Creator. If we won’t face that fact, we will never repent and accept the life from above. We can convince people to give up one addiction for another, but only spiritual rebirth can put us on a path that leads to Christ likeness (Romans 8:29).

Consider: People are seeking satisfaction of the soul. The fallen soul will never be satisfied. It always demands more. A redeemed soul that has found satisfaction in Christ is a powerful witness.

## 6/11 Romans 2:3-4

*3 Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*

Paul had pointed out how wickedly the Gentiles behaved, but then he asked all who would accuse them to examine their own hearts. We are usually the most disgusted with the evil in which we see our own weaknesses. Do we suppose God will judge others because they dive into their temptations but not judge us because we only fall now and then? Does God judge on frequency or is rebellion simply rebellion? Jesus tells us that even to contemplate evil in our heart is equal to committing the act (Matthew 5:28).

Paul goes on to ask if we presume upon the kindness, forbearance, and patience of God, as if somehow He will overlook our sins but not those of others. Do we take the patience of God to this point in our lives, look at all our blessings, and then think we must be God’s special chosen ones? Being aware of the kindness of God should not cause us to overlook our sins, but rather to be grieved that we could continue in them. The patience of God is the grace of God to get us to the point of realizing the wickedness in our own hearts. Those who are constantly criticizing others have yet to understand this passage. We are all sinners. Pride is just as rebellious toward God as adultery. The fact that we are not all in hell this second is the kindness of God to lead us to salvation in Jesus.

If our trust for life eternal is placed in anything we do, other than receiving the salvation offered to us in Jesus, we are simply deceiving ourselves and living in the rebellion of pride. God is patiently waiting for us to wake up to our condition, humble ourselves, and repent. To trust in our own faithfulness is to fail. To trust in the faithfulness of God is to gain life eternal.

Consider: Do you recognize that the things you condemn in others are often the very weaknesses in your own heart?

## 6/12 Romans 3:21-22a

*21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22athe righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*

How God deals with humanity’s sin is what sets Christianity apart from all other faiths. Paul is teaching that our problem is sin. Even those who try their best fall short of God’s standard of holiness. No man or woman is good enough to stand in God’s presence. God is holy and we are sinful. Some other religions agree to this point. The great difference is in what we can do about this dilemma.

The Jews say to be repentant and do good works. The Muslims say to die as a martyr or try your best and hope Allah is merciful. The Buddhists and Hindus say to keep trying each life cycle. Jesus says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) Jesus knows we will never be good enough for God, so He paid our sin debt and offers us His righteousness. By receiving the Holy Spirit, the transformative work begins and will conclude when we see Him face to face (1 John 3:2). The solution for all other faiths is to try harder. Jesus’ solution is to trust and believe in Him.

Paul wrote that the Law and the Prophets bear witness to this way. Every prediction of the Messiah bearing our sins and defeating Satan, from Genesis to Malachi, testifies to the Messiah Jesus being God’s solution to our sin nature. Instead of trying in our limited power, we yield to His all-powerful Spirit.

Consider: Have you placed your faith in Jesus? Have you begun yielding yourself moment by moment to God’s Spirit?

## 6/13 Romans 4:16

*16  That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,*

Paul pointed to Abraham as the quintessential example of what is required for salvation. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). Abraham responded to God by faith. He was not perfect in all that he did, but he believed God. Because of that belief, God promised that he would be the father of many nations. His offspring would inherit the world to come (Romans 4:13).

Paul describes the offspring not as physical descendants who attempt to keep the Laws of Moses, but as all who walk in the faith that Abraham demonstrated. He believed God. Paul could see that God was working around the world in every culture, drawing people to Himself, just as He had drawn Abraham. They may not have heard the Scriptures, just as Abraham had not heard, but they responded in faith to the work of God in their life. They share the faith of Abraham. He becomes their father in a spiritual sense, for he went down the path of faith before them.

What about the innocent native who never heard the gospel? This is Paul’s answer. Salvation is by faith in the grace of God, not a perfect knowledge of soteriology (the study of salvation), or none would be saved. Salvation is guaranteed to all Abraham’s spiritual offspring, but not to all his physical offspring or every Jew and Arab would be saved without faith. It is faith in the grace of God, which means we believe God, which results in receiving His saving grace. That was made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus, though Abraham did not understand the means.

Consider: Those who come to God by faith who have never heard the gospel will readily receive the good news when they hear it (Romans 4:22-24).

## 6/14 Romans 4:23-24

*23  But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, 24  but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord . . .*

The Holy Spirit spoke to Abraham and told him that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the night sky. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:5-6). Paul used this passage from the books of Moses to show that salvation is by faith in God and His Word. That Word may come by the Holy Spirit as it did to Abraham or it may come by the proclamation of the gospel.

When the gospel is proclaimed, people hear the Word of God and the invitation to believe Him and place their trust in Him. Faith is believing that God can do for you what you can’t do for yourself. The gospel declares that Jesus died for our sins and rose for our justification. His sacrifice of His own life in our place was accepted by God, who restored Him to life as proof of that acceptance. We can believe that, just as Abraham believed what God spoke to him, and it will be counted as righteousness to us, as well.

We should not miss the fact that the only reason that Abraham’s faith could be counted as righteousness is that Jesus would, in the future, die for his sins. Jesus’ death in our place makes the faith transaction possible for all who have ever lived, because justice was meted out upon Him. Jesus died for Abraham, you, and me.

Consider: We believe God for salvation, but let us also believe Him for the power to live to testify of Him every day.

## 6/15 Romans 5:1

*1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul has reasoned from the fact that Abraham was justified by faith and counted as righteous, that we, too, can be made right with God by believing God’s message through Jesus. Jesus said He came to be our ransom (Matthew 20:28). If we believe in Him, we will not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). Paul had been told by the apostles that this was Jesus’ teaching, but he had to verify it from the Old Testament Scriptures to be certain.

Now that we are made right with God, we are at peace with God. We don’t need to fear judgment. God may discipline us in this life, but God will not condemn us. An easy way to remember the meaning of *justified* is to realize that my faith in Jesus means that in God’s eyes it is *just as if I’d* never sinned. His holiness no longer demands just punishment on my life, for Jesus received that punishment in my place.

This peace is a wonderful possession. We can face death without fear. We can know that our loved ones in Christ will be waiting for us on the other side. God will welcome us into His kingdom. So many people live with a continual fear of death and are uncertain about tomorrow, but we need fear no longer (Hebrews 2:15). Come what may we are at peace with Almighty God who holds our future in His hands.

Consider: If we realize this truth and live in it, the world will see our worry free countenance and want to know how they can have the same peace.

## 6/16 Romans 5:10

*10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*

What an amazing and loving God we serve! While we were rebelling against our Creator, He did for us what we could not do for ourselves by taking the judgment we deserved and dying in our place. Paul is telling us that if He went to that extent to redeem us when we were shaking our fist in His face, consider what He will do now that we are reconciled to Him.

Paul describes what is happening to us now as being saved by the life of Jesus. After being reconciled, He takes up residence within us (John 14:23). His very life is within our spirit. That life begins the process of sanctifying our every action, conforming us to His image. It is salvation from the destructive patterns of our fallen nature. We’ll be in that “much more” process of being saved by His life until we leave these old bodies behind.

Saving us by His life is drawing us “much more” closer to the heart of God. We are being transformed in the way we think and the things we desire. It’s not that God loves us more, for He sees the finished work and could not love us more than He already does. We are “much more” saved from the consequences of sin because we are increasingly setting it aside. Our hearts are “much more” assured of the promise of heaven, for we can see the life of Christ at work in us. As the fruits of the Spirit increase in our life because of His life in us, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:2).

Prayer: Lord, help me be attentive to Your life in me. Thank You for the “much more” that causes me to reign in life through You (Romans 5:17).

## 6/17 Romans 5:12

*12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—*

This is a fundamental Christian doctrine, but one the world has a very hard time accepting. Adam and Eve would have lived eternally had they not sinned. They were made to live forever. Body and soul were meant to live on and walk in fellowship with God. Death is the rightful claim of the Destroyer on the soul that sins for the soul that sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:4).

Because Adam sinned, we as his offspring have his fallen nature. With that nature we are prone to sin and therefore forfeit the right to live on. This is just what Jesus came to change. He told Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26a and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26a). While our bodies will die due to the corruption of sin, the Lord who is life will cause us to live. He is resurrection, as well, and in His time will raise our bodies and transform them into imperishable bodies (1 Corinthians 15:52-53).

Death is the work of Satan, but it is his rightful work because all have sinned. We will lose our loved ones and our own physical life, too. The one solution is the One who is the resurrection and the life. There is no other escape from the consequences of our sins.

Consider: Man’s greatest dilemma has only one solution, Jesus. How we need to share that at every opportunity!

## 6/18 Romans 6:1

*1 What shall we say then? Are we to sin so that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?*

God’s grace is so abundant and free that many who hear of it think it is too good to be true. On the one hand, they think God should not judge us because we are so weak. On the other hand, they think free grace is too generous. What we all should realize is these two attributes of God are perfected by one another. Justice is essential to God’s nature and He could not be more insistent on enforcing it. However, His grace is just as fervent a desire. The two met on the cross where justice is poured out in its fullness on Jesus who could bear our sins and endure the wrath of God upon them. Yet, through this one act, God justly made his grace available to us all.

Does it matter how we live now? Does the wife whose husband labors daily to provide for her have a desire to be faithful and loving in return? Our compulsion to live a godly life comes from the love that is born when we realize the price Jesus paid so that we might be recipients of such amazing grace. Our sinful nature died upon the cross with Jesus (Romans 6:6). If that is so, how can we nonchalantly take it up again? It may be zombie-like in trying to resurrect itself, but we are free to put it back in the grave. That, too, is grace.

Love is a great incentive and we must nurture that love. The other incentive is discipline. The consequences of allowing the zombie of our old nature to visit us is often the discipline we receive from our loving God. Without that discipline we might wander even deeper into the destructive path of sinfulness. God loves us too much to let us go too far down that path.

Consider: You know what is best for you. Don’t compromise!

## 6/19 Romans 6:19

*19 I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.*

Paul has to address us in language we can relate to and understand. I believe he is saying that the word *slaves* is not perfectly fitting but still communicates the thought he wants us to understand. We presented our mind, eyes, mouth, and limbs as slaves of impurity. The more we indulged in impurity, the more we desired to serve it. Paul describes it as lawlessness, for we were eager to ignore the laws of God. We thought that in serving those things we would somehow be fulfilled, just as Eve saw the fruit looked good to eat and would make her wise (Genesis 3:6).

In the same way that we increasingly indulged in lawlessness, looking to it to satisfy our soul and somehow fill our emptiness, so now we should increasingly surrender ourselves as slaves to righteousness. We should spend more and more time in prayer and the Word. We should be hungry to indulge in fellowship and worship. We should crave time focused on filling ourselves with the good things of God, abandoning ourselves to Him.

That increasing surrender to the will of God and His service and worship is the process by which He sanctifies us in this life. The eternal view is that the work of sanctification is accomplished because of Jesus’ sacrifice, but right here and now we are working it out in our daily life. Presenting our mind, mouth, eyes, ears and limbs as slaves to righteousness is our daily participation with His work in us.

Consider: Stop right now and commit your entire being to the service and worship of God.

## 6/20 Romans 7:6

*6 But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.*

All religious people who try to please God by following a set of rules find their relationship with God is one of compulsion. It doesn’t matter if those rules are good or not so good; they define service to God by the do’s and don’ts of the rules. The Jewish laws were for the good of the individual and the nation; nevertheless, they prescribed a relationship through rule keeping. They were literally set in stone. Some Christians today find their service to God to be just as impersonal.

In context of today’s passage, Paul is using an analogy of a woman whose spouse has died to illustrate how we have been freed from servitude of the religious laws. Our marital vows are until death do us part. (See 7:1-5.) Jews saw themselves as married to the Laws of Moses. Paul is telling us that we died to the Law when we associated ourselves with Jesus in His death on the cross. After all, He is the Word made flesh. Now we can marry another, who is the Spirit of God. Now we serve Him instead of rules.

Think of it this way: Would you rather have a spouse who gives you a list of rules to obey and as long as you keep them he or she is pleased with you, or would you prefer a spouse whose heart you share and whom you serve out of love for who the person is? The Spirit of God changes our hearts to desire that which God desires.

Consider: Both types of relationships involve submitted service, but we meet the demands of the latter in joyful cooperation.

## 6/21 Romans 8:1

*1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

We are all born with a propensity to sin. Even when we know what God’s righteous demands are and have a desire to meet them, we find we can’t obey them. We struggle with the guilt that comes with disobedience. It can be very depressing to fail again and again. In Romans chapter eight, Paul instructs us that we no longer need to wallow in condemnation. Jesus has paid our sin debt and given us His righteousness.

If that were the end of all He did, it would be enough, but there is much more. He has given us His Spirit so that we can live in newness of life. Now when we are faced with temptation we have the power to turn from it. This does not mean we will never sin again, but it does mean we have been given the power to obey should we choose to employ that power. Where we were once slaves of sin, unable to break free from its demands, we now are free to obey the Spirit of God and empowered to do so.

We are sorrowful when we fail to employ this power. We still run to the throne of grace and ask for forgiveness, but we don’t stay depressed about our failure. We may need to pray for more resolve or we may need to surrender some area of life to a greater extent, but we know God will help us to overcome. The believer’s propensity changes from sin to service stemming from love. Our remaining struggle is to keep the old nature in the grave and our new nature nourished in Christ.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for the work of Your Holy Spirit in me! Help me to yield to Him day by day and realize the power He brings to say “Yes!” to life and “No!” to sin.

## 6/22 Romans 8:5-6

*5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6  For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.*

When a person places their faith in Christ, he or she has a mental paradigm shift. What they once thought of regularly, they now abhor. What they once thought was of little or no value, they now dwell on continually. The mindset becomes altered. It is not as if the free will has been taken away or that the carnal nature is gone, but rather that the values have been changed.

To live according to the flesh is an animal-like existence. It is to seek what satisfies the body and dwell on those things that do. The flesh can take a subtle form. It can act like a saint for purpose of self-exaltation, or it can receive exaltation in the eyes of others. Either way, it can obtain what it desires. However, because the carnal nature seeks the temporal, it always fears losing the things it craves or being discovered as utterly selfish. Life in the carnal nature is to be spiritually dead and to expect eternal death.

To live according to the Spirit is to yield to the new life within. It seeks to do God’s will and live in communion with Him. Life in the Spirit seeks the glory of God, not one’s own glory. That life finds joy in serving others in love. That life is to truly live now and it anticipates an even more joyous future because of the peace we have with God.

Consider: Both lives have moments of happiness and pain. This verse identifies the biggest difference in the two. One is death and the other is life. One is at odds with our Creator, and the other is at peace with Him. May you chose life and peace.

## 6/23 Romans 8:13

*13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

Those who have placed their faith in Christ have received the Holy Spirit. The life of Jesus lives in them. That is why we are obligated to live according to the Spirit’s leading. In context, Paul is emphasizing that our carnal nature is dead because of sin but our spirit is alive because of righteousness. (See 8:1-12.) That doesn’t mean that we suddenly become instantly sinless or he wouldn’t have gone on to add our verse for today.

Putting to death the practices of our carnal nature is something we actively do moment by moment. The Spirit of God gives us the discernment to know what is of the old nature and what is of Him. He also supplies the power we did not have before to yield to the new nature. That is life in the present and life eternal. Jesus said He is life (John 14:6). To live in the Spirit is to live in Jesus and have Jesus living in you.

Jesus will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), but we can choose to not to experience life at any time. By refusing to kill the old nature, which is to refuse its demands, we step out of the fullest life, though Jesus is still residing in us. We tell people to “choose life” in regards to the abortion issue, but shouldn’t we remind ourselves and our brothers and sisters in Christ to choose life moment by moment?

Consider: After all He has done for us to give us the blessed opportunity of truly living, it must grieve Him when we let the old nature reign over us.

## 6/24 Romans 8:17-18

*17And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*

In this glorious chapter on the Spirit filled life, Paul tells us that we are heirs of God. That is because we are adopted brothers and sisters of Jesus. You might wonder how we could be heirs if God can’t die. Remember the parable of the Prodigal Son? The inheritance was divided while the father was still living (Luke 15:12). We will inherit all things (1 Corinthians 3:22). All things are from God and are ours because of our sonship. God’s pension fund for us is more than fully funded. But it is not without a cost to us.

We must suffer with Christ. It isn’t that we invite it, but when we live for Him it will come our way. The Enemy of our soul is not going to lose us without a fight. God uses the suffering to mature us, drawing us into a greater intimacy with Him. He has promised in this passage that if we suffer with Him we will be glorified with Him. That means that when we see Him face to face, we will be like Him (1 John 3:2). There is no greater hope than this.

With that future promise in mind, what is suffering in this short life? We can’t compare it to the glory that will be seen in us. That glory is difficult for us to grasp, but the more we accept this promise, the greater our hope becomes and the less our afflictions matter to us. That glory is to have love, joy, peace, and all the fruits of the Spirit in their perfect state. It is unhindered fellowship with and complete submission to our heavenly Father. It is to know His love in all its fullness.

Consider: To experience the complete love of and full fellowship with God is the longing in the heart of everyone, whether they realize it or not. If we refuse to fulfill it in Jesus, we will never be fulfilled.

## 6/25 Romans 8:32

*32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

Those who have accepted the work Jesus accomplished for them on the cross should realize the implications of this verse. If God would allow His one and only Son to suffer and die for you, is there any good thing He would withhold from you? The redeemed soul recognizes that good things are not material blessings that would distract us from our relationship with God. Good things are spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 1:3). Those good things draw us deeper into a love relationship with God.

This reasoning goes right along with Jesus telling the disciples that the Father will not withhold good things from His children when they ask (Luke 11:13). We have access to unlimited resources. You can be certain that if the thing you ask for in prayer is good for you, you will receive it. If you don’t receive it, you can know it wasn’t good for you.

The Apostle is also pointing out the depths of God’s love for each of us. He loves each of us so much that He would pay such a costly price to redeem us. He never changes, so that love will be the same forever. When He grants your request, it is not because you deserve it, but because His heart is gracious and loving. Stop for a moment and think of what you really need to draw closer to Him or to serve Him in a more effective way. Take it to Him in prayer and know that if it is good for you, He will graciously give it.

Consider: Our hearts should always be assured by the extent of the Father’s love for us.

## 6/26 Romans 8:35

*35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?*

Following Jesus does not exempt us from suffering. In fact, we are more likely to suffer physically as Christians. This is the same chapter in which Paul wrote that God will not withhold any good thing from us. Because God is sovereign over the details of our lives, the list of difficulties in our verse for today must in some way be good for our eternal well-being. If the love of Christ is with us in the midst of these situations, what do we have to fear? And if our suffering is for His sake (Romans 8:36), then we are sure to be storing up our treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20).

If you are looking for a life of physical comfort, you won’t find it in Christ. But living for comfort will bring soul distress that comes with unbelief. When you live with the uncertainties of health, financial markets, wars, and most importantly eternal judgment, life can be quite uncomfortable. To have the love of God means that in whatever comes our way, we will have the comfort of the Holy Spirit and the peace of being in God’s will. Instead of the fearful expectation of what will come when we pass from this life, we will look forward to that day.

None of us can tell what tomorrow holds, but believers know who holds tomorrow. With the certainty that nothing can separate us from His love and knowing He knows all, sees all, and has all power, we lay our heads down at night and sleep in peace. Paul goes on to declare that even when believers are in difficulty, they are more than conquerors.

Consider: What would a person gain if he or she had a perfectly comfortable life but lost their eternal soul (Matthew 16:26)?

## 6/27 Romans 9:30-31

*30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.*

You can never be so bad that God’s mercy and grace cannot save you, but you may be too good to accept the fact that you need His mercy and grace. As Gentiles came into the family of God with grateful hearts, Jews began to harden toward this new expression of the Gentiles’ faith. The One like Moses, Jesus, had changed the law in ways that made them uncomfortable (Deuteronomy 18:15). No longer were the rituals enough to make one feel right with God. Now the apostles were challenging the Jews to accept that Jesus was God’s sacrifice for their sins. That was humbling. It was also uncomfortable, because the Jewish leaders looked down on and even persecuted the new sect.

The leaders asked, how could these new followers of the Christ think that people who had never tried to keep the laws and rituals were suddenly forgiven when others worked so hard to do what God commanded in the Law? That doesn’t seem fair. This way of thinking was preventing many Jews from embracing the salvation that Jesus brought. What would you or I have done had we been a good observant Jew and seen this radical shift? Let us hope we would have searched the Scriptures to see if it was really true.

Perhaps we would have even thought that if God loved the world, and if sin was as bad as the Word declares it to be, then this was the great solution our people had been looking forward to since Abraham, who was saved by faith. Still, the tension between the pursuit of truth and the comfort of fitting in with our culture would have been great. The same tension exists today for many of the same reasons.

Consider: Is my pursuit of the truth prevailing over my desire for comfort?

## 6/28 Romans 10:12-13

*12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13 For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

The Judeo-Christian worldview is the only one that can claim to hold the same value on every human life. It holds that all are created in the image of God. That belief alone makes prejudice, bigotry, all forms of abuse, murder, theft, and adultery to be unethical. The secular world cries out against inequality while at the same time teaching Darwinian evolution that declares we are unequal and should fight to rise to the top. God is not biased toward any race or people group. Every soul is precious in His eyes.

The riches God gives to those who call on Him are of an eternal nature. He is Lord of all humankind, whether they know it or not. He draws each and every one to Himself. To respond to His work in our heart by calling out to Him to save us is the beginning of our salvation. Those who call out to Him will be saved!

To call on the name of the Lord is to call on the Creator for His wonderful attributes of grace, mercy, and love. It does not mean to have His name correctly pronounced, or even to have heard from a missionary what God revealed His name to be. It is to call on His attributes in recognition of His power and authority. Whoever does so, no matter their ethnicity, physical or spiritual condition, or past sins, will be saved. Almighty God waits for each person to humbly respond to His work in his or her life. This is why John wrote that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him would not perish (John 3:16). That includes every individual born on this planet from day six. It grieves God that so many will refuse to come.

Consider: Invite people to call out to their Creator, even if they have had a bad experience with “Christians.” God can straighten out our misperceptions in time.

## 6/29 Romans 11:6

*6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.*

In Romans 11 Paul was explaining why the majority of Jews had not yet accepted Jesus as the Messiah. He explained that the current situation was just like it had been in the days of Elijah. Elijah thought he was alone, but God told him there were 7000 that had not bowed the knee to Baal. God’s grace had preserved a remnant of believing Jews. Then Paul added our verse for today. It is grace that draws us out of our culture into the kingdom of God and grace that helps us to remain faithful to continue serving God.

Christians understand that grace has saved them, and then they desire to please God with their works. They take up a pattern of living that they think God would approve. What begins as a love response can turn into a routine of rule keeping. When they fail, they feel they have failed God and can’t be good Christians. They have forgotten that God was pleased with Jesus. He is our righteousness and sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30). Grace saved us and grace sees us through the experiential process of sanctification. That process isn’t completed in this life. God couldn’t love the backslidden believer any more than He already does.

We should increasingly recognize that we are daily recipients of the grace and love of God. Be grateful that Jesus died for all your sins, past, present and future. Get back up even more determined to let the Holy Spirit direct and sanctify you, but realize you will never be perfect in this life.

Consider: Men, when you think you’ve arrived, ask your wife how far you have yet to go. Thank God for His continual grace!

## **6/30 Romans 11:33**

*33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

Paul could see that the Jews in large part had rejected their Messiah so that the Gentiles would hear the message. This was God’s sovereign plan for the world to hear the message of salvation. Eventually the Jews will acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah (Romans 11:25-27). This revelation caused Paul to burst out in words of praise. Our verse today is the beginning of those words. He begins by praising the wisdom and knowledge of God. God knows all things. He can see every possible scenario and knows the end from the beginning.

God’s judgments are unsearchable. We mortals complain about the judgments of God in the earth as if we know something God didn’t. God knows every single factor out of the quadrillions involved in each situation. We could never in one lifetime fathom a tiny fraction of what God takes into account. He is always just and righteous, and all that He does is good.

God’s ways are inscrutable. That is to say that the outworking of God’s plans are incomprehensible to us. Paul was admitting that he was seeing only a miniscule portion of what God was doing. That tiny revelation put Him in awe. Every once in a while we catch a glimpse of a little bit of the working of God in our lives, those coincidences that are way outside the realm of chance, and we wonder at the mysterious ways of God. When that happens we should turn to Romans 11:33-36 and lift up Paul’s inspired words of praise to our amazing God.

Consider: If you have not already seen Louie Giglio’s talk on the greatness of God. Be amazed at the wonder of God’s creation. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PtpTk2ENq7o

## 7/1 Romans 12:3

*3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

Romans 12 begins the exhortation portion of the letter to the Romans. Paul wrote that it was by the grace of God that he is about to tell us what we should be doing. If any of us has godly advice for another, it is by the grace of God. Here is a man that once killed and imprisoned Christians, and he is about to tell us how to live. He can only do that because the grace of God reached down and saved him and renewed his mind. It is the same for us all. If we have something of value to share with others it is because the grace of God has gifted us with a life transformation and a message that needs to be heard.

He warns us not to think too much of ourselves, but to think with sober judgment. In other words, be honest about your place in the body of Christ. If you think you are a great leader and no one is following, think again. If you think you are nobody but you see God working through you to encourage someone, think again. Don’t try to exalt yourself, but neither should you downplay the gifts and faith that God has given you. The body of Christ does not need ego trips, nor does it need false humility.

As believers, we tend to swing to one extreme or the other. We want to do great things for God and God wants to do great things through us, but our idea of great things isn’t always God’s idea. Spending years befriending someone which results in that person understanding the gospel is a great thing. Being a speaker that leads people into the deep truths of God is a great thing, too, as long as God gets all the glory. Each of us has been given a measure of faith. Soberly assess what God has called and gifted you to do. What is your measure of faith and how does He want you to use it?

Consider: Being faithful to exercise your gift of faith by the grace of God is a great thing!

## 7/2 Romans 12:10

*10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.*

The first fruit of the Spirit of God in our life is *agape* love (Galatians 5:22). That is a love that is like God’s love for us. It is unconditional and values the one that is loved. In our verse for today, Paul uses two different words for love, *philadelphia* and *storge*. These two words speak of a fond familial love like that between siblings and parents’ love for their children.

The church is not a club. It’s a family. The difference in how we view those we worship with will certainly set the atmosphere in our worship services and our time together. A club looks skeptically on guests who attend. The members may enjoy their time together, but their club is merely an enjoyable option to their lives. There is no need to value all the members.

A church family, on the other hand, welcomes guests as a part of the family they are meeting for the first time. Everyone that attends is part of the family, whether we like them or not. You are born, or in this case born again, with a family. We find ways to get along and appreciate what each member brings. Even more than a natural family, we love one another. That’s because we know that they are loved of God and that they love the same Lord we love. And we honor one another because each member has the Spirit of God living in them. Each one has a gift that the church needs.

Consider: Imagine how encouraged your church would be if each person outdid one another showing honor. Let it start with you.

## 7/3 Romans 12:11

*11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*

Believers in Jesus have a purpose and a calling. We realize we have a short amount of time to invest in eternity and glorify God on the earth. This should fill us with eagerness to be accomplishing God’s will each day. Paul is warning us not to slack off and lose the passion to accomplish what God has called us to do. There is an urgency to rescue the souls of those who are perishing without salvation.

The original language for *fervent* meant “boiling liquid or glowing metal.” Our spirit is our innermost being where the Spirit of God dwells within us. It is from our spirit that we commune with the Spirit of God. Sometimes we refer to it as our heart. If we are to stay passionate about our service to God, we need to keep stoking the fire in our spirit. We need to keep that two-way communion with God open and vibrant. It is from a heart that glows from the heat of God’s love that we can reach out and show His love to others.

Fervency of spirit is necessary to serve the Lord as we should. If we forget the greatness and privilege of God’s call on our lives, these necessary qualities will grow cold and our service to God will falter. How stoked are you? I find that when I am growing cold it is because I have not been in the Word of God and listening to the Spirit in prayer. If I’m not meditating on Scripture and challenged by on-fire brothers or sisters in Christ, my heart begins to cool and the world has a greater attraction. We dare not neglect our time with God and fellowship with the family of God.

Prayer: Lord, help me to order my days so that my priority is You. May all that I do and say be guided by Your loving instructions to me. Help me to keep fanning the flame.

## 7/4 Romans 12:21

*21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

This simple expression is an easy one to memorize but a challenge to live. Human nature responds to evil with evil, but that only escalates the conflict. When we join in the evil, we are being overcome by it. When arguments become personal and insults are hurled, only the Spirit empowered person can return a loving and gracious response. When that happens, the person attacking us may be overcome with good. It might not happen right away, but when the person is faced with a persistent loving attitude, good will overcome evil.

The family is the place where personal attacks most often occur and where hurts grow and fester. We tend to hurt the ones we love because our expectations of them are so high. This is true within the church family as well as our natural family. Recognize what is happening when tensions build and respond with loving kindness. Go the extra mile to be gracious and forgiving. Overcome evil with good.

Some expressions of evil are much more difficult. Physical attacks on one’s family and loved ones because of our faith are on the increase in our world. Our life is but a vapor (James 4:14). Even these things cannot separate us from God’s love (Romans 8:39). One believer told me when he witnessed to a man, the man knocked him out and put his head in front of a truck tire. Thankfully, the driver refused to move the truck. When the Christian came to, he continued to witness to the man. That man was so dumbfounded at the love and patience of the Christian that he listened to the message. Even in such extreme situations evil can be overcome by good.

Consider: Memorize this verse. Put it into practice and see what God can do.

## 7/5 Romans 13:8

*8 Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.*

We can rack up debt in many ways other than with money. We can owe others such things as forgiveness, respect, help, favor, and time, to name just a few. Paul the apostle tells us the only debt that should remain outstanding is love. That is because we can never give enough love. The more you give, the more you receive, and then the more you owe. Freely we have received the love of God, and so we should freely give that love to those who are made in His image.

Sometimes we ask God about how to treat a relationship that is strained. Here is God’s answer: love! We might worry about whether or not we are walking in God’s will. Love those you meet with the love of God and you will be fulfilling the law of God. To love others we must love God first and foremost. It is the source of our love. In doing that, we fulfill the first four of the Ten Commandments. Out of that love we then love our fellow man, which has us keeping the next six because love does no harm to one’s neighbor (Romans 13:10).

When a follower of Jesus is financially debt free, he or she is free to give when there is a need. When a financial crisis hits, and it will, the believer is a shining example of the value of being free of covetousness. Paul’s exhortation in our verse for today is wisdom from above. It is both spiritual soundness and practical in real-life situations.

Consider: How much better off would you be relationally and financially if you lived this verse?

## 7/6 Romans 13:14

*14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

I am repeating this one verse from *Through the Bible Daily Devotional* because I find it so helpful. Jesus is our robe of righteousness. Us in Christ and Christ in us. That is the ideal church. However, Paul reminded the Roman church that it was something that they must do. Every believer must put on Christ. It is very similar to putting on the armor of Ephesians chapter six (Ephesians 6:10-17). Every part of that armor has its source in the Word, and Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:14).

When we are clothed in Christ we act as He would act. We love like He would love. We live, move, and have our being in Him (Acts 17:28). We move at His will, and align our will with His. That is when the world will see Jesus in our work, leisure, and worship.

Being clothed in Christ, we don’t look for opportunities to gratify our sinful nature. Our mind is set on what is spiritual and our desire is to please the Lord in goodness and holiness. The cravings of the sinful nature don’t vanish. We must choose to set our mind and heart on things of eternal value (Colossians 3:1-2). When we find our thoughts have been distracted by our old nature, we take control of those thoughts and submit them to Christ. We see carnal desires for what they are and the destructiveness to which they lead. In Christ we find greater joy and desires that are edifying.

Prayer: Lord, help me to remain clothed in You. Help me to continually set my mind and heart on that which is godly and align my desires with Yours.

## 7/7 Romans 14:5

*5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.*

The apostle Paul understood grace perhaps better than anyone that ever lived. He was a persecutor of Christians, and yet God called him to be an evangelist who wrote a large part of our New Testament. While he clarified for the church many doctrines of our faith, he also cut a wide path for differing convictions on minor details of living out the faith.

There seems to have been a lot of controversy in the early church about which day to worship and whether or not believers could eat food that may have been offered to idols. In regards to how one practiced their faith in these areas, Paul encouraged people to follow their conscience. If you think something is a sin, then don’t do it. At the same time, don’t make an issue of someone who does not have the same conviction. And don’t intentionally tempt a fellow believer who holds a different conviction by exercising your freedom in front of that person. Paul encourages us to limit our freedom so as not to cause anyone to stumble.

Real freedom is being able to not do what we really want to do for the sake of love. It is the freedom to walk in the Spirit and demonstrate the grace we have received. Each of us will answer to God for our words and actions. Live in such a way that you can look forward to the account that you will give on that day.

Consider: Fellowship focuses on the things we have in common regarding our love for Jesus and appreciation for what He has done for us. It is the humble soul who will not insist on arguing about minor doctrines and nonessential convictions.

## 7/8 Romans 15:13

*13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

Paul calls God “the God of hope.” Our greatest hope in this world is that God is who the Scriptures declare Him to be. If He is truly almighty, gracious, merciful, and abounding in steadfast love, then we have a glorious hope (Exodus 34:6). Because of His promises to transform us into the image of His Son, we have the greatest hope (Romans 8:29). Contrast this hope we have with the hope of an atheist or one who practices any other religion and you will get a sense of why Paul referred to God as the God of hope.

Paul is asking that the God of hope fill us with joy and peace in believing. When the grace of God helps us to believe the attributes and promises of God in Scripture, we are filled with joy and peace. Knowing that God loves us to such an extent should fill our hearts with joy in the present while we look forward to even greater joy in eternity (Hebrews 12:2).

What greater peace can we have than to know that Almighty God will work everything together for good in our lives (Romans 8:28)? We can deal with whatever circumstances come our way because our great God of hope holds our hand and walks us through it (Romans 8:37). The peace we have in knowing our eternal destination is perhaps the greatest comfort to our hearts. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s (Romans 14:8). As the Holy Spirit helps us grasp these truths we abound in hope.

Consider: Take a moment to think about the joy and peace that should be ours because of what God has done and will do for us. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to your heart how much God loves you so that you may abound in hope.

## 7/9 Romans 16:17-18

*17 I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. 18 For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.*

The church has always been under attack from false teachers. The essential gospel of Jesus has been unchanged for thousands of years. God took on flesh in the virgin womb of Mary and lived a sinless life among us. He lived a sinless life and willingly went to the cross to take the sins of the world upon Himself so that justice would be satisfied. He conquered death and hell and offers eternal life to all who will receive by faith what He has done for them. He rose from death, ascended into heaven, and is coming again. False teachers will always emphasize something else and make some other thing the main thing.

The false teachers desire to be leaders to serve themselves, not the Lord Jesus. They feel that they have to be the most important person in the room. They may feign humility, but at the same time they will tell you why God has elevated them above everyone else. Their goal is always self-gratification in some form. The true spiritual leader humbly serves the Lord and seeks to glorify Him alone. That leader’s emphasis will be what Jesus had done for us and how we all should have a personal relationship with Jesus.

The false teachers’ tools are described in this verse. They use smooth talk and flattery to target those who are naïve. They appeal to pride, which is the very thing that deceived them. The special new revelation they claim to have exalts them and their followers in their own minds. That revelation they claim to have often includes some kind of works that makes them feel superior to those who don’t do that thing they think earns them favor with God. Paul warns us to watch out for them. They were around then, and they are just as prevalent today.

Remember: Guard your heart and guard the flock against ego led sheep rustlers.

## 7/10 1 Corinthians 1:23-24

*23 But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

The gospel is about Jesus dying for our sins so that we might be saved. It isn’t a people-pleasing message. Jews knew from the Law that anyone who hung on a tree was cursed. Indeed, Jesus took the curse of sin upon Himself. Even the crown of thorns on His head was a picture of God’s curse upon sin (Genesis 3:17-18). That was the very purpose of His death, to take upon Himself the just curse that we deserved.

Some Gentiles (non-Jews) saw the worship of a crucified Lord as foolishness. Their gods were powerful but self-serving. They would never allow themselves to suffer humility at the hands of mortals, let alone a death like crucifixion. One early second century Roman graffiti depicts a Christian worshiping a crucified man with a donkey head. That was how many Romans viewed the worship of a crucified man.

To those us who God has called, the crucifixion is the greatest display of the love, mercy, and justice of God. It was the one way God could save our lost souls while satisfying His demand for justice. Christ, our Messiah, could see the horror of sin and the wrath it deserves, but could also see the victory over sin and death that He would obtain. He could see the formation of His bride set free from sin in the beauty of holiness. The cross is the wisdom and power of Christ on display for all who are called to behold it with awe and wonder.

Consider: We partake of Communion to gaze again and again on the marvel of what Jesus accomplished through man’s most gruesome deed. Take a moment right now to look upon the cross of Jesus and thank Him for what He did for you.

## 7/11 1 Corinthians 1:30

*30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption . . .*

It is because of the grace of God that we are in Christ Jesus. It was grace that drew us, grace that opened our eyes, and grace that helped us repent and receive salvation. If God did not do all of that and more, we would have chosen the temporal pleasures of this world over eternity with our loving Lord. Thank God for His grace!

Jesus became to us wisdom from God. His life and words showed us what is truly wise. That is so contrary to the wisdom of this world. Jesus became our righteousness. God would not allow anyone who is not utterly righteous into His presence. In Jesus, we are clothed in His righteousness. He also became for us sanctification. He is the One that helps us reject the opportunity to indulge in the pleasures of sin today, and tomorrow, and every day until we see Him face to face and our struggle is over.

Finally, Jesus has become to us redemption. He has redeemed us from the judgment we so justly deserved. He paid our penalty so that we could go free. He didn’t just pay for our past sins, but for all the sins of mankind from Adam to the last person to live. It is because of all that Jesus has become to us that we should love Him with our whole heart, serve Him with all our strength, and use our minds to learn of Him and His ways. Temptation’s power is nothing compared to the power of Christ in us.

Consider: We have nothing to boast in but our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

## 7/12 1 Corinthians 2:9

*9 But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”—*

It seems we most often use this verse to refer to the wonderful things we will experience in heaven. However, in this passage Paul is referring to the mystery of Jesus coming into the world to save sinners. He goes on to say that God has by His Spirit revealed to us what God prepared for us who love Him.

When Christ came into the world, only a few wise men knew of His coming. Even they did not know He was God incarnate. The disciples who were with Him every day and saw His authority over created things needed a revelation from God to understand the mystery of the Word made flesh (Matthew 16:17). Why would we think that we could understand the times in which we live and God’s purposes for our lives without the Spirit of God’s revelation to us? How can we understand the Scriptures merely by attending man’s educational facilities? We need the Spirit of God to reveal to us the things He has prepared for those who love Him.

As you read this devotional, you need the Spirit of God to make the applications to your life that are specifically for you. The author may not always be inspired, but the Word is. Always ask the Lord what He is speaking through His Word to your heart. Your natural mind is a tool, but only when you yield it to the Spirit will you have the mind of Christ. The applications He speaks to your heart are specifically for you.

Prayer: Lord, as I daily take time to consider what You are speaking to me, help me to be still and let You reveal Your Word to my heart.

## 7/13 1 Corinthians 3:3

*3 For you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?*

The Corinthian church had divided into factions, with each one arguing that it was the best, superior to all others. Paul went right to the root of the problem. They weren’t walking in the Spirit. Sure signs of a carnal life are jealousy and strife. Both are products of the old nature. The Corinthians were jealous over spirituality. It was a spirit of competition which stems from pride. They pointed to the greatness of their particular teacher, claiming that teacher’s doctrine was better than that of other teachers. Spiritual pride results in strife over minor doctrines to the neglect of the major ones. The result is division.

Paul wrote that they were behaving like the world. The fruit of the Spirit was absent in their lives. Paul realized he could not teach them the deeper truths of God’s Word because they hadn’t grasped the central teaching. To recognize that we are sinners saved by grace alone puts us all on the same level. When we grasp the fundamentals of the gospel, we are humbled. We realize that God has opened our eyes by grace, and unless God opens others’ eyes, they can’t receive spiritual truth.

We also see that we are a part of a family of sinners who Jesus has redeemed. That makes us a part of a great and loving family of grateful people whose first goal in life is to love their Savior more each day. Sharing that passion draws us together and gives us the hunger to listen and receive from one another. It also gives us patience to overlook others’ faults, knowing that they overlook ours. We realize we are all a work in progress headed for that glorious day when we see Jesus face to face.

Consider: If there is jealousy or strife in your life, take another look at the gospel and humble yourself before the Lord and others.

## 7/14 1 Corinthians 3:22-23

*22 Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, 23 and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.*

As a member of the body of Christ, everything is yours. The Corinthian factions were each claiming one particular teacher was theirs, and, of course, theirs was the best. Paul is telling them all the teachers belong to all of them. In fact, in Christ Jesus, the world, life and death, and the present and the future belong to all believers. We seldom stop to think about the wonder of our position in Christ (Ephesians 2:6). What else is there? We live to the Lord eternally. We have victory over death. The present is an opportunity to serve Him. The future is more glorious than we can imagine. What is there to fight over?

The Corinthians had not grown out of their worldly mindset of competition. In Christ there is nothing to compete over. Everything is ours! It takes spiritual growth to live by faith in this reality. We lived in the flesh for so long that our minds tend to go down the same old paths. We had thought that worldly pleasure was the goal. Now we realize that the goal is conformity to Jesus (Galatians 4:19). We thought being the best was the ideal. Now we know it is to walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). In Him, everything is ours. Where He guides He provides because everything is His.

All things are yours because you belong to Christ and Christ is God’s. We can give without fearing loss. We can be generous with our time because the present and the future are ours. There is no need to try to impress others or exalt ourselves. We are in the exalted One. We can obey the whisper of the Holy Spirit without any kind of fear when we realize that all is ours, and we are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.

Consider: Do you realize the truth of these verses? Do you live in that realization?

## 7/15 1 Corinthians 4:7

*7 For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?*

The issue Paul was addressing was pride. Nothing has changed in 2000 years. We still think our preacher or denomination is the one that got it right. Behind that opinion is the idea that we have more knowledge and discernment than those who don’t agree with us. Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that spiritual maturity is manifest in outward behavior. You don’t have to argue to show growth. Your life will demonstrate a selfless service to others out of a heart full of the love of God.

Paul’s second question in this verse is a key to humility. What do you have that you did not receive? Everything we are and have came from God. Our mind, body, provision, and spiritual life are all a gift from Him. That takes away any grounds for boasting or feeling of superiority. We can only boast in Him. A child can think himself or herself superior to others because of their nice clothes, but that child was given the clothing. The child didn’t earn it or produce it. We are dependent beings. We need God for every breath we breathe.

Paul’s final question asks why we would boast as if what we have comes from us. I’m sure those he addressed paused for a moment, as we should, to consider what he had asked them. If we argue against Paul’s logic, we know we may be asking God to prove it by withholding His blessings from our lives. No believer wants to do that, because we instinctively know Paul is right. We have no grounds to boast and elevate ourselves over others because we are completely dependent upon God, just like everyone else.

Consider: Humility comes from seeing the reality of our condition.

## 7/16 1 Corinthians 4:20

*20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.*

Have you ever met someone who is outspoken about his convictions, only it seems he has found something wrong in every Christian leader? It is as if the person thinks his opinions and interpretations should be canonized. While claiming to be humble, that individual has a comment on every issue and every person. He can talk! But when we examine the criticizer’s life with the same scrutiny and critical eye he has toward others, there is a great deal of inconsistency.

The power of God transforms our life. While the Word is conveyed in language, it is manifest in the power to make spiritually dead people live. That power changes the fruit in one’s life from that of the flesh to the Spirit (Galatians 5:19-24). Real spiritual maturity stands in confident faith that God’s purposes will prevail. They have a peaceful assurance that, come what may, God is able to work everything together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

That power is not manifest in retaliation, but rather it is seen in the choice to rise above the conflict. When struck on the cheek a weak person will run. A strong person will fight. An overcomer will turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:38-39). That is real power! It is ours when we are walking in the Spirit and completely trusting God rather than ourselves. When Scripture clearly affirms our convictions and we stand in complete faith in God without wavering, people see the power of the kingdom of God.

Consider: Have I been rising above in Jesus or coming down to the world’s level?

## 7/17 1 Corinthians 5:11

*11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.*

Churches should be very welcoming places. We should be patient with those who come seeking salvation though they are living a sinful lifestyle. We should also be patient with those in the church who stumble into sin but are repentant. God is gracious with us and so we must extend grace to others. However, there are limits to what we should tolerate from those who call themselves Christians.

I remember the first time this verse came alive to me. I thought it was godly to stay with the same church through whatever it experienced. I was grieved over what I perceived was happening in the leadership. This verse was the voice of God to me telling me I was free to leave. What fellowship does light have with darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14)? Calling oneself a Christian does not make the person a Christian. When any of the sins Paul lists—sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness, and swindling—are prevalent, they infect the whole congregation (1 Corinthians 5:6). The testimony of that group of believers is damaged.

Churches are often fearful of exercising discipline because of potential lawsuits or church splits, but if our testimony of Christ is to be clear, we must. This does not mean that we hunt for sins among the members, but rather that we confront those who are blatantly sinning and whose sin is known to all, just as in the situation with which Paul was dealing.

Consider: If you personally associate with someone that calls himself a Christian and yet he has a reputation of engaging in one or more of these sins, those who see you will think you approve of that behavior. Disassociating ourselves from those who practice these sins shows them how seriously we take them and our action may encourage them to change and return to fellowship. That was the case with the man Paul was addressing. He needed tough love in order for him to see the seriousness of his sin and be led to repentance.

## 7/18 1 Corinthians 6:7

*7 To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?*

Some of the Corinthian believers were entering into lawsuits against their fellow believers. Paul asked why they didn’t take it to the church and let the elders make a judgment. If the saints are going to judge the world and angels, why would they think a worldly judge would be better at settling their disputes? These little matters are trivial compared to the judgments we will make in the future. Paul was shaming them for their lack of confidence in the body of Christ.

Paul called their propensity to file lawsuits against one another a defeat. They were hindering the testimony of Jesus in Corinth because of the way they misrepresented Him. The Enemy of their souls had won a victory by getting them to squabble over minor issues and bring them to the world for resolutions. The same thing happens today in churches around the world. Believers who disagree with their brothers cannot humble themselves to accept the judgment of the godly leaders of their congregations.

Paul asked a very challenging question. Why not rather suffer wrong and be defrauded? If all things are ours and we trust in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:21), why wouldn’t the spiritually mature person let the other party have what he or she thought they should have? To lose some possession in this world for the sake of the testimony of Christ is a privilege. Don’t we believe the Lord will provide for us? Why not end the contention by giving up something you can’t take to heaven, anyway? Remember, the one who humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 23:10)!

Consider: Everything we do should be for the glory of God and the advancement of His Kingdom. Don’t let the Enemy defeat you by being absorbed in trivial things.

## 7/19 1 Corinthians 6:12

*12 “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything.*

This phrase, “All things are lawful for me” may have been a saying within the Corinthian church. Paul is not promoting this expression. The surrounding verses warn that the sexually immoral, thieves, revilers, and swindlers will not be in heaven. He warns us to flee from sexual immorality. While Christ has freed us from the Old Covenant laws, being in Christ means we are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). We don’t do immoral things because of a law but because we belong to Christ and His nature is in us.

Christ freed us from the bondage of the Law, but not all things are helpful. I can drink wine. However, drinking in excess will not help my walk with the Lord or my physical well-being. I can worship on any day of the week or every day, but if my practice is not drawing me closer to the Lord, I need to find God’s will for me.

While we are free from the Law, we should be careful not to indulge in anything that will dominate us. We are in a love relationship with Jesus. Anything that supersedes that is idolatry. If something other than Jesus dominates my thoughts and activities, I have once again become a slave of sin. My freedom has become a bondage. We are free from that Law that we might be the servants of Christ by the Spirit (Romans 7:4).

Consider: Is there anything you have permitted to be in your life that is not helpful to your relationship with your Savior?

## 7/20 1 Corinthians 7:24

*24 So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.*

Paul was addressing marital and employment status of new believers. He believed the return of Christ was soon to come. That has been the conviction of the church throughout its history. It is a spiritually healthy attitude. If a man was single, Paul suggested that he stay single if the man’s passions were under control. That would allow him to keep his whole focus on serving the Lord. He even suggested that slaves not seek to be freed unless the opportunity arose.

In every situation in life, there needs to be a Christian witness. While Christianity has historically raised the standard of living, that is not its main goal. The main goal is to introduce others to Jesus and life in Him. That life is not dependent on circumstances or class. His power manifests itself in the lives of the rich and the poor, the influential and the servant. His joy is not a matter of outward conditions, but of the heart.

The world needs Christian doctors and Christian waiters. We need Christian attorneys and Christian janitors. Every area of society needs the Christian influence so those they come in contact with can see the difference Jesus makes in every position in society. Our satisfaction is in Him, not in our status or possessions in this world. He turned our perception of things upside-down when He taught that greatest among us would be the servant of all (Mark 9:35).

Prayer: Lord, help me to look to You for the satisfaction of my heart, and not to the things of this world. I thank You that I can enjoy the blessings of this creation, but may these always pale in my mind and heart when I compare them to their Creator.

## 7/21 1 Corinthians 8:1

*1 Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up.*

“All of us possess knowledge” must have been another of the phrases that the Corinthian church frequently used to justify eating meat that had been offered to idols. Meat was difficult to come by other than through pagan temples. The Corinthians apparently believed that their knowledge of there being only one true God allowed them to purchase the meat offered to idols that are really nothing but stone.

Paul is warning them that “knowledge” can puff us up. If you think you know more than your brother and act in a way that wounds his conscience, then that knowledge is an excuse to act out of pride. Love builds up our fellow believers. Love will act in ways that does not cause others to stumble. Pride in our knowledge tramples over others’ sensitivities.

The spiritually mature thing to do is to set aside your freedoms for the sake of others. To be truly free is to walk in the Spirit, and the first fruit of the Spirit is love. Spiritual strength in the Lord will deny oneself for the sake of others to build them up. Love will not do anything that might destroy a weaker brother.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to love my fellow believers like You do. Help me to be aware when my actions might offend a weaker brother or sister in word or in deed. Give me the love that will deny my freedoms for their sakes. Show me how I can build them up.

## 7/22 1 Corinthians 9:22b-23

*22b I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.*

The salvation of a lost soul is of invaluable worth; therefore, I will set aside anything that might offend the person with whom I am sharing so that they might hear the message. I will intentionally look for the things we have in common so that the person can relate to what I am saying. I’ll be cautious as to how to best express spiritual truths in ways that my listener is most likely to comprehend and receive. And of course, I’ll seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as to what might connect with what God is already doing in the person’s heart.

There is nothing more exciting than being an instrument of sharing the Good News. Seeing a spiritual birth is as exciting and mysteriously wonderful as a physical birth. Paul said that he would share in the blessing of the gospel when he led others to salvation.

While knowing a set of salvation verses may be helpful, each person we share with is unique. Each person has an untraveled road to Christ. If we are to be a guide along that road, we have to walk with that person. It is often a sacrifice of time and a commitment to pray and follow through, but the blessing is more than worth it.

Consider: Has the Lord put you in the life of someone that hasn’t heard the Good News of salvation through Jesus and life in Him? Are you praying for them daily and watching for opportunities to share? How can you relate to them right where they are?

## 7/23 1 Corinthians 10:4-5

*4 And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. 5Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.*

Paul was warning the Corinthians to not become complacent in their walk with the Lord. He had used Israel in the wilderness centuries ago as an example of how people can see the Lord at work and be blessed by Him every day and yet displease Him with their life. Their journey through the Red Sea was a kind of baptism. They drank water that miraculously came from the Rock, which Paul tells us was Christ with them. But when the moment of testing came, they showed they really had no faith in God.

In spite of enjoying all the blessings of God and considering themselves children of God, they were idolaters. Some of them actually had idols from Egypt, but Paul is warning of a different kind of idolatry. When we think our salvation is up to us, our strength and wisdom are our idols. When Israel heard the reports from the spies, they looked at themselves for salvation and not to God. It was evidence of their idolatry.

The church today can be just as idolatrous. We experience the blessings of God and the spiritual food and drink from His Word, but then we look to politicians to save us, or financial diversification, or any number of things. God alone can save us. When we put our faith in anything or anyone else, we become just like Israel at the border of the Promised Land, trusting in ourselves.

Consider: Am I placing my trust in anything or anyone other than the Lord?

## 7/24 1 Corinthians 11:28

*28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*

The church of the first century consisted of every class in society. Bible scholars estimate that the majority were slaves. When they had Communion, it was more like a meal. The wealthy who had leisure would come early and eat and drink their fill, while the slaves who weren’t free to come until later went away hungry. Paul warned them that this was so offensive to God that He was afflicting some in the church with illness. Some had even died. Apparently, they did not relate the affliction with God’s discipline. Paul points out that they were being afflicted so they would not be condemned with the world (1 Corinthians 11:32).

We serve Communion today in an orderly and reverential fashion. However, we may do what the Corinthians were guilty of in a different way. While they showed a lack of love for one another by the manner in which they took it, we can do the same in the attitude of our heart. The problem was a lack of love and concern for the rest of the body of believers. Are we helping those who are in need within our fellowship or turning a blind eye? Are we forgiving those who have offended us or holding a grudge? The bread we partake of is a picture of Christ’s body and so is every congregation. We can’t partake of Communion with reverence for Jesus’ bodily sacrifice unless we love His body on earth, our fellow believers.

Whenever you take Communion, pause and consider your attitude to the believers with whom you fellowship. If you are neglecting a need or find unforgiveness in your heart, resolve to take care of it that day. Let the love of Christ have His way in your heart before you take the bread and drink the cup.

Consider: Do we think all illness is just a random problem, or do we consider that in some cases we may be experiencing God’s discipline so that we won’t be condemned with the world?

## 7/25 1 Corinthians 12:22

*22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable . . .*

Paul had addressed the factions that form when people boast of following one particular teacher. The old nature within us tends to take pride in differences, as if we are the only ones who really have the truth. The same type of thing was happening in respect to the gifts of the Spirit.

Paul explained that every gift is essential and the all gifts are dependent on what each gift brings. He related it to parts of the body. If the body only had one part it would be useless. If it is missing a part, it is handicapped. A healthy and effective congregation will have all the various gifts and appreciate each one.

In our verse for today, Paul dealt a blow to those who were prideful of their gift while at the same time he encouraged those with the more common gifts. Every time I have done a survey of the gifts in a congregation, the gift of helps and giving seem to be most numerous. Those are the gifts most needed in the everyday life of the church. No wonder God gives more of us those particular gifts. Preaching elders are few, but we don’t need to have an abundance of that gift. Without your toes, your body has a very difficult time balancing. Whatever gift God has given you is indispensable to the proper functioning of the congregation you attend. Use it to help build up the body and advance the Kingdom. Value the gifts of others, as well.

Consider: A body part all by itself is a frightening sight. It indicates there was a horrible accident. We all need to be a part of a local congregation. They need our gift, and we need their gifts.

## 7/26 1 Corinthians 13:4-5

*4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful.*

The previous chapter was an exhortation on the gifts of the Spirit. The diversity of gifts is important for a well-equipped church. Paul ends the chapter by telling us that he will show us a more excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:31b). That way is the way of love. Gifts are helpful. Love is essential. Without love, which is the first fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), we can accomplish nothing of real value (1 Corinthians 13:2-3).

It was love that brought Jesus to live among us. It was love that testified to the truth throughout His life. It was love that took Him to the cross to pay our sin debt. It is love that calls those who trust in Him His bride. And it is love that patiently speaks to our hearts, helping us to grow spiritually day by day.

How do we know if we are expressing the love of Christ in our lives? See our verse for today. His love is patient and kind with others. It isn’t envious of another’s gift or talent, nor does it boast of its own abilities. It is never rude. The love of Christ does not demand to get its way. The next description is a real challenge to me. Love is not irritable. How are you doing in traffic or with your loved ones? I have a long way to go. Love doesn’t hold grudges. It isn’t resentful but graciously forgiving and understanding. Jesus demonstrates this kind of love in the way He is with us. We need His life in us to show this godly love to others.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I know that without You I cannot express the love that is so fruitful for Your kingdom. I long to show others the love that You show me. Help me see Your love more clearly every day that I might show Your love to the eternal souls I meet.

## 7/27 1 Corinthians 13:8

*8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.*

*Agape* love, the love of God, will never pass away. If that love is in us, we will not stop loving someone and we won’t give up on them. Spouses need God’s love for one another. We need this godly love for those to whom we are witnessing. We need it for family members. Most of all, we need to have this love toward God. It is a love that values another for their intrinsic value without expecting anything in return.

By contrast, the gifts of God’s Spirit will cease when we are in heaven. There will be no need for prophecy. Everyone will know the Word. There will be no need for tongues, either to commune with God in prayer or to witness. We will be speaking with Jesus face to face. Knowledge in this case is the supernatural insight into a person’s situation, such as that knowledge Jesus had of the woman at the well (John 4:17-18). Our lives will be an open book.

Paul is trying to help the Corinthian church to see that the gifts are temporary, but love is eternal. It will never pass away. That is why our emphasis should be on love more than on the gifts of the Spirit, as valuable as they are. We need the gifts now in our childlike state, but we will grow up. Love will ever be essential in the kingdom of God, for God is love (1 John 4:8).

Consider: How are you doing at loving others? It is a sign of your spiritual growth. It is essential for your church’s witness. It is the expression of Christ in you.

## 7/28 1 Corinthians 13:13

*13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

The gifts of the Spirit that help to build up the body of Christ will one day no longer be needed. God’s work in us will be completed. Have you heard this expression? “A hearse is never followed by a moving van.” Not only will we leave behind all physical possessions, but we will leave our spiritual gifts, as well. The good news is that we will take with us our faith, hope, and love.

Our faith is our conviction based on the Word of God. It is also our expectation based on those convictions. We will continually see the fulfillment of that faith, or as the song says, “My faith will be my eyes.” The same is true for our hope. Every godly hope will be realized throughout eternity!

Greater still is love. The greatest love on earth is a dim shadow of the fullness of love we will experience in eternity. The old nature and our physical limitations that keep us from seeing and comprehending the greatness of God’s love will be out of the way. As the seraphim are overwhelmed by God’s holiness (Isaiah 6:3), so we will be overwhelmed by God’s love again and again, forever! The more we realize how much God loves us, the more we will love.

Consider: Why wait? Open your heart to that love as much as you can today and every day until you are there beholding Jesus in the fullness of love face to face.

## 7/29 1 Corinthians 14:1

*1 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.*

Love will remain when the gifts are no longer needed. That is why it should be our pursuit. To pursue *agape* love is to pursue God. This is not to say that the gifts of the Spirit are not helpful. We should desire one additional one above all others—that is the gift to prophesy.

To prophesy is to speak forth the Word of God at His leading. It is to apply the truth of God to a particular group of people or to an individual at the time the person needs to hear it. A quick scan of the words of the prophets and you will see that very little of their message was of future events. Predicting the future is often the only definition we give to prophecy. While it is at times a function of that gift, the biblical emphasis of the gift is on delivering God’s message to those who need to hear it.

Prophecy can warn or comfort, convict or encourage. The prophets in our Bible were anointed to speak and record the very words of God to particular people. In this passage from Corinthians, Paul tells us that the gift in the era after Jesus’ earthly ministry is to strengthen, encourage, and comfort (1 Corinthians 14:3). It is often expressed in the preaching portion of a worship service or in the call to worship. While teaching and preaching are gifts, to teach or preach a message that God has given the speaker for that assembly of believers at that particular time is to prophesy. Because others as well as the speaker have the gift, they can judge whether or not the message is specifically for them (1 Corinthians 14:29). We may jot down a note to remember what was said, but we don’t add it to Scripture. It usually is a Scripture from the recorded words of those who held the office of prophet in our Bible.

Consider: Let us come to worship the Lord with the expectation of hearing something specifically for us. We should always be listening for the Lord to speak to us in our spirit or through a brother or sister in the Lord. How many times have we heard a prophetic word for us and not realized God was speaking to us?

## 7/30 1 Corinthians 14:27-28

*27 If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.*

For some strange reason, many churches today completely ignore or explain away this verse. The gift of tongues can become quite a divisive issue. If the church followed Paul’s simple, inspired guideline, it would not be such a problem. Instead, you can walk into some churches today and hear a roar of most everyone praying aloud in tongues. Paul clearly warns that this will sound like a group of foreigners to anyone that happens to attend. It doesn’t build up the body of believers, which is the purpose of the gifts when we are together (1 Corinthians 14:4, 6-12).

Notice how the word “if” begins our verse today. Tongues are not necessary to a worship service. But if there are people who feel they must exercise that gift, limit the tongues to two or three persons, one at a time, and then only if someone can interpret. Otherwise, they can silently exercise that gift between themselves and God.

There is a variety of beliefs in the church regarding this gift. Some think the gifts are no longer functioning since we have the Bible. Others think everyone should have this gift. The Scriptures seem to indicate it can be the miraculous gift of speaking another’s language (Acts 2:8). Another expression of the same gift is a heavenly language that is between your spirit and God in prayer (1 Corinthians 14:2). Paul’s concern was that we be aware of how our gifts affect others. With the exception of a prayer language, all gifts should edify the believers (1 Corinthians 12:7).

Consider: When someone claims to have a gift of the Spirit but is being divisive and not edifying to the body of believers, the elders of the church should confront the person in love, using the Scriptures. Everything should be done decently and orderly (1 Corinthians 14:33). What is your gift? How are you helping to build up the believers where you worship?

## 7/31 1 Corinthians 15:3

*3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scripture*

This verse begins a passage that is one of the earliest records of the beliefs of the early church. Biblical scholars believe it developed within three years of Jesus’ crucifixion. Critics of the Bible have claimed that the beliefs of the church drastically changed over time. But this early account is what we believe two thousand years later.

It begins by saying that Jesus died for our sins in accordance with the Scripture. The early church saw Jesus’ death for our sins as the fulfillment of prophecies. It goes on to say that Jesus was buried and raised on the third day according to prophecies. After Jesus’ resurrection He appeared to Peter, the twelve disciples, James, and five hundred people at one time. Paul adds that Jesus also appeared to him.

The early church knew the mission of Jesus was to die for our sins. They saw His death and resurrection as the fulfillment of Scripture. They knew He was alive because of all the eyewitnesses. Our beliefs on these core issues have never changed. These are the essential truths that unite the followers of Jesus.

Consider: Are these the main doctrines that you emphasize? Are these the issues that unite you with those in other denominations?

## **8/1 Corinthians 15:14**

*14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.*

Our faith hinges on the resurrection of Jesus. There are many religions that claim to be the truth, but the resurrection of Jesus is one of the main events that sets Christianity apart. That is one reason why it is so frequently attacked by some new author that wants us to believe it was a hoax. But in two thousand years none of those theories have stood up under critical examination. See 5/5 for more on this.

If death is the end, the message of the Gospel has no solution for our greatest problem, death. How would we know that Jesus could raise us? How could we know His sacrifice was accepted by God? If faith in Jesus only results in a life that is persecuted with no reward, what kind of a God would we be serving? Without resurrection the curse on sin, death, would be a permanent condition. Thank God Jesus’ did not stay in the tomb!

Almost all of the disciples died for their conviction that Jesus rose from death. If it was a hoax, why would they give their lives for it? The enemies of Jesus bribed soldiers to lie about what happened. If they didn’t believe it was true, they would have had Rome search for the body instead. The resurrection is an historical fact. It means Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins was accepted by God. It means that if you accept His gift of salvation, you will be raised as He was. It means that God loves us to such an extent that He would allow Jesus to endure such a brutal execution to save us from the second death.

Consider: Could anyone demonstrate a greater example of love? You are loved!

## 8/2 1 Corinthians 15:58

*58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

If we were serving the Lord for this life alone, it would still be the right thing to do. He is worthy to be served and honored with our lives even if life ended at death. Though following Jesus isn’t the easiest or the most pleasurable life, it is the best life. His instructions are for our good. But this life is only the beginning, a dot that begins a line that goes on forever.

This chapter points out the promises of God to raise those who believe in Jesus. By His sacrificial death and resurrection He has proved the power of sin to condemn us has been broken. Death is just the beginning of a glorious eternity with Jesus. That is why Paul tells us to be steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord. We will be rewarded.

The short time we live in this present world is incomparably brief compared to eternity. But what we do with this time God has given us affects that eternal condition. Jesus told us to lay up our treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20). We labor for the Lord because we love Him, but this promise of reward is additional incentive to never give up or slack off. Jesus’ resurrection proves that ours is coming.

Consider: Considering the return on investment, we should be joyfully serving our King.

## 8/3 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

***13****Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 14 Let all that you do be done in love.*

Paul gave the Corinthians one final string of admonitions before closing his first letter to them. “Be watchful.” Jesus used the same Greek word when He asked the disciples to watch with Him in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:40-41). It means to be spiritually alert. Is there something in your life that is tempting you to compromise? Does someone in the faith need your encouragement? Is God setting an opportunity before you to step into those good works He prepared in advance for you to do (Ephesians 2:10)?

“Stand firm in the faith!” Don’t compromise or waiver. There will always be challenges to your faith from people and circumstances. Remember the examples of those who have gone before you. Remember Jesus’ example. Remember that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. Giving in to discouragement and doubt may mean the end of your effectiveness for the Kingdom. I’ve seen it lead to depression in the lives of believers. Don’t start down that path. Stand firm in the faith, act like men, and be strong in the Lord.

Do everything in love. This is *agape* love. We serve out of love. If all our service is to the Lord, then we should do it because we love Him. Yes, He will reward us. Yes, it is the right thing to do. But our motivation for all our service should be our love for Him and for those made in His image. We will be tempted to operate out of routine, or duty, or even anger. That should warn us that we are not in the Spirit. Love is the first fruit of the Spirit and a telltale sign that we are acting in Christ.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I need Your life in me to help me stay alert. Be my strength. Help me to stand firm in the faith against the pressures of this fallen world. May all that I do be done out of love for You. Let it be Your love that flows through me.

## 8/4 2 Corinthians 1:9

*9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.*

While Paul and his team were in Asia, they suffered such hardships that they did not want to go on living. Life in this fallen world can be very difficult. Serving God brings additional suffering. Paul called it sharing “abundantly in Christ’s sufferings” (2 Corinthians 1:5). They endured the suffering because they were advancing the Kingdom and seeking out lost souls to form new churches.

It seems that some were saying Paul’s sufferings were due to some spiritual deficiency. The same accusation is slung about today. Paul told the believers that suffering is something we all experience, and perhaps those in ministry sometimes suffer more than others. But we also share in the comfort of God and pass that comfort on to others in their time of trial.

The work of God in the midst of the suffering is causing us to rely on God. When we know we are too weak or discouraged to do what God has asked, we have to look to God for His strength. We have to depend on Him alone. I have found the Sundays when I felt most unable to preach because of health problems or lack of courage can end up with me delivering one of my best sermons. Why? Because the preaching has had to be in the Lord’s strength and not my own. The One who raises the dead can raise our weak bodies or discouraged souls to do what He alone can do. Then He receives all the glory.

Consider: We should strive to rely on God even when we feel confident, for His strength is infinitely greater than ours.

## 8/5 2 Corinthians 2:11

*11 . . . so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.*

Paul encouraged the church to forgive and welcome back the brother who had been expelled from fellowship. That brother had seen how sinful his actions were and was being overwhelmed with sorrow. Now it was time to welcome him back into fellowship and let him know he was still loved. Forgiveness and reconciliation counter Satan’s schemes.

Whenever you see unforgiveness and division, you are seeing the Enemy’s design outwitting us. Jesus prayed for us to be one (John 17:11). The Enemy wants us to be divided. Jesus told us to love one another (John 15:12). The Enemy wants us to harbor unforgiveness and hatred. That is his design. When our reasoning gets in the way of doing what Jesus has asked us to do, Satan is outwitting us.

There are times when church discipline will not end in reconciliation, but that should never be because of unforgiveness. It should only occur when there is a lack of repentance. Since we are aware of the tools of Satan, we should lean toward grace and look for every opportunity to forgive and restore. However, we should at the same time keep the unity of the overall flock in mind. If the person sows false doctrine or practices blatant sinful behavior, the elders have no choice but to separate him or her from fellowship, for they are not ignorant of Satan’s designs.

Consider: Sometimes your elders will have to make decisions for the sake of the flock and not be able to openly explain why they have exercised discipline. It may be to avoid a lawsuit or because some things were said in confidence. Pray for them to act in wisdom and to see through the Enemy’s designs.

## 8/6 2 Corinthians 3:3

*3 And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*

Paul is referring to a prophecy given by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36:26) and combining it with one from Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31). The days would come when God would take the heart of stone from Israel and give them a heart of flesh. God would make a New Covenant with them, writing the law on their hearts. Paul is saying that day has come and their transformed hearts are proof of it.

The apostles explained the New Covenant, salvation by faith in the work of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the law within their hearts. Instead of the historical stony heart of Israel, the believers in Jesus have a heart of flesh, a gift from God, to desire to do the will of God, and to obey rather than to rebel. By the grace of God they are done with idolatry. In the language of the prophets Paul was saying that the kingdom of God had come.

That was Paul’s proof of being an apostle. He had helped them enter the Kingdom. He quickly goes on to add that it wasn’t because He is so great, but that God has equipped the apostles with everything needed to usher in the Kingdom (2 Corinthians 3:5-6). The glory of this New Covenant far surpasses the old. The old came with shaking of Sinai, thunder, and a fearful warning of what it meant to disobey. How much more glorious is the new that has come with the promise of eternal life in Jesus!

Consider: Is your life a demonstration of the letter written on your heart of flesh? Are you living daily in the glorious New Covenant?

## 8/7 2 Corinthians 4:5

*5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.*

The great hope of the minister of God is that he will disappear as he paints a portrait of Christ before the eyes of his listeners. The last thing a godly messenger wants to hear is that he was outstanding. If people see the speaker instead of Jesus and go away thinking how excellent he was, they have utterly failed. The church in Corinth was divided because they were enamored with the messenger and were missing the message.

Presenting Jesus more clearly and seeing the listener have a greater desire to walk with the Lord is the goal. Anything that distracts from that must go. While ministers should be respected and their gifts appreciated, their ministry is to point to Jesus and cause the congregation to long to know Him more intimately. That is why they serve.

Their service is for Jesus’ sake, not their own. The godly minister is not trying to build a bigger congregation, or make his name famous, but to exalt Jesus. Ministers are slaves of Christ. A slave is focused on his or her master’s honor. If they have any honor it comes from the honor of the one they serve. The church today is falling into the Corinthian pattern of praising the man and focusing on him rather than Jesus. “I follow Joel Osteen.” “I follow MacArthur.” “I follow Benny Hinn.” Let us follow Jesus and pray for those who minister!

Consider: How many nameless shepherds have lived their life as servants of congregations so that others might know Jesus? We will surely be surprised in heaven by the glory of those whose names we never heard.

## 8/8 2 Corinthians 5:4

*4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.*

Some commentators believe that there were those who questioned Paul’s apostleship because of his afflictions and suffering. The same idea of true believers having perfect health is in the church today. Paul is telling them that he hopes they all have perfect health and never suffer, but the apostles certainly suffer for the sake of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:7-12). Righteous Job suffered ill health. Epaphras almost died of an illness when he was ministering to Paul (Philippians 2:30). Suffering, whether physical or emotional, is a part of human existence. God uses suffering to mature us and help us focus on what is eternal (Psalm 119:71).

As we age, we increasingly experience the weakness of our physical bodies, which Paul calls our tent. That is a biblical way of looking at the body. It is the temporary shelter of our spirit on our pilgrimage through this life. Tents wear out. As Paul was a tentmaker, he knew that quite well. Tents need repairs after facing the storms of life. Eventually they become worn out and ready to be discarded.

Old age makes us long for the heavenly body. We long for the mortal to be swallowed up by life. While our souls will be with Jesus upon death, our bodies will remain here. When the last trumpet sounds, God is going to do one of the greatest recycling jobs ever done. Our old bodies will be transformed into heavenly ones that are like His when He rose. There was nothing left of Jesus’ body in the tomb. What walked out was not of the same properties as the one that was carried in. Yet it was recognizable, disguisable, touchable, and incorruptible. Jesus could eat and talk, appear and disappear, and He had flesh and bone. He could physically ascend to the Father. That is the same type of new tent that we shall have (Philippians 3:21).

Remember: This tent is not permanent, but do take good care of it. Don’t get too attached to it as it is wearing out. It must last until we are ready for the new one.

## 8/9 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

*14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised*.

If you were sentenced to death, and someone tried to befriend you whom you had ignored in the past, even rebuffed at times, and then voluntarily stepped into the execution chamber in your place, how indebted would you be to that person? Could you go on as if it didn’t happen? But what if you discovered that person was God in the flesh, your Creator? For Paul there was even a greater sense of grace and love, for he had been persecuting the followers of Jesus.

Such love and mercy showered on Paul caused a great sense of gratitude to surge in his heart. His love for the One that could be so gracious to him now controlled his every action. All that he did was for the love of Christ. He died with Christ and no longer lived for himself, but for the One that died and was raised.

It wasn’t only for Paul that Christ died, but for all. We’ve all been shown great mercy, for we are all by nature rebels against God with a death sentence on our heads. We were living for ourselves. Christ came to set us free from that bondage so that we might discover why we were created. It is to live for Christ, for His glory, in response to His great love. Have you died with Him? Does the love of Christ control you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help my heart to grasp the greatness of Your love. Let my every action be a response to that great love that You have showered on me.

## 8/10 2 Corinthians 6:14

*14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?*

This verse is most often applied to those who are considering marriage (Deuteronomy 7:3). Without the common foundation of Christ, the marriage will be on a very unstable footing, for the couple may never be truly united in heart.

This verse was not written specifically about marriage. It applies to every area of life. Business partnerships can end in disaster. While one party seeks integrity and to honor God and the other is out for personal gain at any cost, conflict will inevitably arise. The partnership usually ends in the Christian walking away at a financial loss. I’ve personally experienced this and seen it happen to others, as well.

There are surely many other areas in life in which this warning applies. Paul is certainly not telling us to isolate ourselves and refuse to associate with unbelievers, or how would we proclaim the gospel? Most employers will not be believers, but working for the glory of God in their service is not partnership. Paul is telling us not to join with them in an officially binding venture. When we join with them in marriage or business or in any other official way, any unity of purpose is impossible. Points of contention are bound to arise. Save yourself the pain and difficulty by refraining from such partnerships.

Consider: What fellowship has light with darkness?

## 8/11 2 Corinthians 7:10

*10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*

In a commentary on Isaiah in the Preaching the Word series by Raymond Ortland Jr., he wrote the following on the good effects of conviction.

What is conviction of sin? It is not an oppressive spirit of uncertainty or paralyzing guilt feelings. Conviction of sin is the lance of the divine Surgeon piercing the infected soul, releasing the pressure, letting the infection pour out. Conviction of sin is a health-giving injury. Conviction of sin is the Holy Spirit being kind to us by confronting us with the light we don't want to see and the truth we're afraid to admit and the guilt we prefer to ignore. Conviction of sin is the severe love of God overruling our compulsive dishonesty, our willful blindness, our favorite excuses. Conviction of sin is the violent sweetness of God opposing the sins lying comfortably undisturbed in our lives. Conviction of sin is the merciful God declaring war on the false peace we settle for. Conviction of sin is our escape from malaise to joy, from attending church to worship, from faking it to authenticity. Conviction of sin, with the forgiveness of Jesus pouring over our wounds, is life.

Worldly grief, on the other hand, produces death. As we dwell on our loss or pain we sink into an ever deepening canyon of despair. If we will not shake ourselves out of it and look for the good, trusting in God for better days ahead, depression sets in. Then it becomes even harder to rouse ourselves to climb out of the darkness of despair into the light.

Consider: We see two sorrows with opposite effects in our lives. One is from God to cause us to be whole. The other is of the world and refuses to trust or hope in God. Know the difference. Welcome the former and refuse to stay in the latter.

## 8/12 2 Corinthians 8:9

*9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*

The apostle Paul had a sense of the great contrast between Jesus in the heavenly realm and the incarnate Christ. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul explained that Jesus had to empty himself to become incarnate (Philippians 2:7). He had direct fellowship with the Father without any hindrances. Like the Father, He was omnipresent, present everywhere. The angels would have fallen down before His glory and sung His praise. He was never hungry, thirsty, or tired. His feet never ached after a long day’s walk.

Suddenly, He was confined within a woman’s womb. Then He was delivered in a manger. He was dependent on Joseph and Mary to feed Him. I imagine He was mocked as a child for being “the good boy.” His actions and words were often misinterpreted. He was insulted, ridiculed, and rejected by His own creation. That was certainly becoming poor. It was for our sake. There was no other way for Him to redeem us.

Worst of all was the torture of the cross. Not only was it the manner of execution reserved for the worst of criminals, but it meant dark hours of separation—the worst of conditions—from the Father, as Jesus bore our sins. The contrast with His heavenly condition could not have been greater. The demonstration of His love could not have been clearer (John 15:13). He gave it all up for you and me. Now He has returned to His glorious state and is waiting to receive us.

Consider: If Jesus gave up that much for me, is there anything I should not be willing to give up for Him?

## 8/13 2 Corinthians 8:14

*14 Your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.*

Paul had been taking up a collection from churches he had planted for the church in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church was going through a time of need. Some of the apostles and Jesus’ brother James were still in Jerusalem introducing Jews to the Messiah. Paul wanted to show that the new churches, consisting mostly of Gentiles, were as much a part of the body of Christ as the churches made up of Jewish believers.

The principle in the verse for today is that wherever the church is in need, those that have an abundance should share to meet that need. We should share within our own church to help those going through a difficult time, but we can also help other churches. Though it is rare today, I have seen churches that are prosperous help others in the same town that are reaching a segment of the town that is in need.

With the communications and travel abilities in our day, we can help third world churches with materials and equipment. We don’t want to encourage dependence on the West, but if we can advance the kingdom of God through meeting needs, we certainly should.

Consider: If you are in a time of abundance, is there a ministry that is being effective that could use your support in donated time, materials, or finances?

## 8/14 2 Corinthians 10:12

*12 Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.*

In the church, the leaders should be the servants of all. They serve the congregation by serving the Lord. It should be a position for the humble who have a deep personal relationship with the Lord. Their goal is to have those they serve follow the Lord more closely. While they may invite others to follow their way of life (1 Corinthians 11:1), they are not seeking to amass people devoted to themselves.

Human ego so easily sneaks its way into any positions of authority. Those with leadership skills will sometimes desire to lead a congregation in spite of their spiritual immaturity. Then they begin to highlight what they have done and accomplished. Paul’s words suggest that doing so is a lack of understanding of godly authority.

Our worth or authority is not connected to what we accomplish. It’s in our relationship with the Lord. It is His calling and anointing that make the difference. Worldly leadership and spiritual leadership have some things in common, but are drastically different in many ways. In the body of Christ, leadership is just one part. It is honored, but it is of equal value to all the parts of the body (1 Corinthians 12:11). Each part is special and valued for its uniqueness. That is why it is a lack of understanding to try to compare one part with another. All glory goes to the Lord for what He does through each member.

Consider: If we want to measure ourselves, we should compare ourselves to Jesus. Then we will see how much we need to grow.

## 8/15 2 Corinthians 11:3

*3 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.*

The church in Corinth had visits from men Paul called “super-apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:5) but who were really “deceitful workmen” (2 Corinthians 11:13). They were more eloquent than Paul. The church listened to their teachings and weighed them against what Paul had taught. This was heavy on Paul’s heart because he was the one who had first led them to Christ. He compared winning them to the faith as presenting a chaste virgin to Jesus for His bride. Accepting other teachings that took the focus off of Christ felt to Paul like the church was straying from her commitment to be faithful to Jesus alone.

Eve was seduced by Satan through subtle manipulation of the desires that she already had. False teaching works in the same way. It appeals to our old nature’s desire to take credit for our good works. It exalts the role of self and self-importance. It turns us from trusting in the grace of God expressed in Jesus to trusting in our accomplishments. That feeds our pride, which is the old nature’s favorite addiction.

True spiritual growth results in an increasing devotion to Christ alone, not in rituals, or methods, or a person, or any other thing. Godly leaders will have this goal for those they lead. Increased devotion and love for Christ should be the main desires of everyone committed to Jesus.

Warning: The Enemy of our soul is subtle. Beware of anything that draws your heart away from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

## 8/16 2 Corinthians 12:10

*10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

The so-called super-apostles who relied on their intellect and speaking ability attracted followers to themselves. Paul, on the other hand, relied on the Lord. He knew that the less he trusted in himself, the more the power of God would flow through him. The less he trusted in self, the more he had to rely upon God.

Realizing this was the case, he was content with his weaknesses, with the insults that came his way, with the hardships of his ministry, and with the persecutions and calamities that came with preaching the gospel. I find this to be a real challenge that constantly reminds me where I have placed my trust. Are you content when your computer crashes, when your car breaks down, or when a health issue arises? If we really grasp that in our weaknesses the power of Christ is more evident, we, too, can be content. If we know our weaknesses make us strong in the Lord’s power, we will see those weaknesses with a new perspective.

What do you rely upon for your service to God? Is it your own strengths? If so, you will find it difficult to be content when those strengths fail. The Lord’s strength is unlimited in supply.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to look to and rely upon You for the strength to do everything for Your glory. Thank You for always being faithful.

## 8/17 2 Corinthians 12:15

*15 I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?*

There is a noticeable difference between God’s leaders and self-appointed leaders. God ordained leaders lay down their lives for the sheep. Self-appointed leaders ask you to lay down your life for their next project. Godly leaders long to see you grow spiritually and deepen your walk with Jesus. Carnal leaders are more concerned about advancing their fame.

Paul gave his finances and time to see the individuals under his care grow in Christ likeness. He gladly paid any cost he could to see the churches established. Worldly leaders want you to pay the cost to advance their cause.

Paul obviously loved the church in Corinth more than the super-apostles did. Did that result in the church loving him less? The sheepish nature of the church, if not gifted with discernment, can cause the church to honor the proud and arrogant who have strong personalities. We must always remember that love is the first fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). It is the Great Commandment (Mark 12:30-31). It is the stamp of Christ on the leaders He ordains.

Consider: When your church is considering appointing an elder, look for this key quality of love. Are you most gladly spending and being spent for the souls God has put in your care?

## 8/18 2 Corinthians 13:5

*5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*

We have the capacity to justify almost anything we do. Politicians come up with some the most convoluted ones, but every man and woman does the same to some extent. Modern culture encourages our propensity to make excuses for our behavior. The Christian must be careful to watch that he or she does not fall into this pattern to justify the carnal nature.

Our verse for today is the daily mindset of the diligent believer. We must continually examine ourselves to see if our old nature is justifying a compromise in our spiritual life. Christ is in us or He isn’t. If He is truly in us, we will be uncomfortable with compromise. If we can walk in sin and not be disturbed, we may not have had a true conversion. Jesus may not have yet taken up residence in us. How many people say they are Christians but live like the world? What is their destiny if they do not repent and accept Jesus as Lord?

We can see two reasons for this continual examination. We must be certain that we have truly been converted. We must then test ourselves to see that we are walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). The first is eternal life or death. The second is life in this present evil world (Galatians 1:4).

Consider: Take some time in prayer to review your speech and actions from yesterday and your plans for today. Are you in the faith?

## 8/19 2 Corinthians 13:11

*11 Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.*

Paul concludes his letters to the Corinthian church with these bullet point exhortations:

* Rejoice! The second fruit of the Spirit is joy (Galatians 5:22). If we are praising God for all His goodness to us, we are less likely to be whining about our differences with one another.
* Aim for restoration by continuing to hope and pray that those who leave the fellowship of believers by falling back into sin will be restored. While we don’t condone their sin, we don’t stop loving them. A truly repentant believer will not mind extra restrictions placed on them because of their weaknesses.
* Comfort one another. We all go through times of difficulty when we need the understanding compassion of the family of God. We all need loving encouragement to keep on keeping on. Remind one another of the promises of God and share how the Lord pulled you through a trying time.
* Agree with one another and live in peace. Look for our common ground instead of focusing on our differences. Set aside your right to be right and try to understand why your brother or sister in Christ has come to the conclusions they have drawn.

The promise connected with obeying these final notes is that the God of love and peace will be with us.

Consider: As we do His will, His presence and power is there to help. We will reap from Him the goodness we have sown into the lives of others.

## 8/20 Galatians 1:11-12

*11 For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. 12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Paul’s doctrine rounds out what Jesus’ twelve disciples taught. Since Paul was a Jewish scholar trained under a leading rabbi, we would expect his teaching to lean toward Jewish tradition. But he was the one God used to bring about a break with traditions while conforming to the intent of the Scriptures.

After his miraculous conversion (see Acts 9:1-18), he went into the desert of Arabia to sort out his understanding of Scripture. Now that he knew Jesus was the Messiah, he had to go back and interpret the Scriptures in light of that fact. For three years he sought to unlearn his previous man-directed education and seek the truth in the Word. He was taught through a revelation of Jesus.

We can certainly learn from those who have been taught by a revelation of Jesus. It will always line up with Scripture and make it all flow together. We can have a revelation of Jesus from the Word, too. We see Him more clearly. The Scripture suddenly makes sense. What we didn’t understand before becomes plain to see. The work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal Jesus to our hearts and minds (John 16:14).

Consider: When the teaching of whatever group or organization you belong to contradicts the Scripture, believe the Word of God. It is God’s revelation of truth.

## 8/21 Galatians 2:16

*16 Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.*

Everyone should desire that God be pleased with their actions, but no one should expect their actions to justify them before God. That is because we are all born with a fallen nature we inherited from Adam. Try as we may, some of our thoughts and actions are rooted in rebellion against God. No amount of good deeds will pay for the evil we think and act on. Good actions are what we are supposed to do. They don’t earn salvation. They don’t pay for the bad deeds. God has a right to expect His creation to do what He commands. All His commands culminate in receiving Jesus as our Savior.

Justification before God is only made possible by faith in what Jesus did for us. If we believe in His act of taking our sins upon Himself and receiving the punishment we deserve for those sins, we are justified before God.

Many of the religious people of the time Paul wrote didn’t like the concept, and some today don’t, either. They think keeping God’s law is making up for their sin. Secular people today think that being a “good person” will get them into heaven. Both groups don’t realize the justice of God demands payment. All God’s commands are fulfilled in accepting Christ as our Lord and Savior. There is nothing anyone can do that makes up for hating someone. To be kind to them and forgive them is what you should do. The debt of the hatred is only covered by the work of Christ on the cross.

Consider: The more we realize how indebted we are to Jesus for what He did for us, the more we love and appreciate Him.

## 8/22 Galatians 3:7-8

*7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”*

Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, the nations of the world. He could see numerous promises in the scriptures of Gentiles receiving God’s blessings. While he was growing up, he could see only Jews who worshiped the one true God, but when God called him, God sent him specifically to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21).

Paul discovered that being a child of Abraham was not a matter of ancestry, but a matter of faith. Abraham was counted as righteous because he believed God, so all who believe God by faith are considered sons of Abraham. Paul quoted a portion of Genesis 12:3 to prove his point. God promised that all the nations would be blessed in Abraham. The Good News of Jesus being the way to God by faith for all who believe is predicted in those words. Abraham was not only the physical father of the Jewish people, but spiritually of all who come to God by faith.

The nations of the world are flowing into the family of God as the gospel is proclaimed. God’s promise to Abraham is coming to pass (Isaiah 2:2). The descendant of Abraham, Jesus, has made a way for all who will believe and thereby become acceptable to God. There are twice as many conversions annually to Christianity than all the major religions combined (fastestgrowingreligion.com/fgr.html). All the nations of the world are being blessed by coming in faith to Jesus.

Remember: If you are in a Western nation with a low conversion rate, remember the bigger picture. The nations of the world are flowing into the Kingdom.

## 8/23 Galatians 3:13

*13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—*

It wasn’t by chance that the crown of thorns was placed on Jesus’ head. Thorns were a part of the curse God placed on the earth because of the sin of Adam (Genesis 3:18). When the soldiers made that crown they had no idea that they were illustrating that Jesus was taking the curse of sin upon Himself. It was also a curse to be hung on a tree (Deuteronomy 21:23).

The laws of God place a curse on anyone who does not live by them (Leviticus 18:5; Joshua 8:34). We find it impossible to keep all the laws, so we are under that curse. But Jesus came and took that curse upon Himself so that we might be redeemed from the demands of the law. It would be like a judge serving the criminal’s jail sentence and any future sentences, as well.

We are free from the laws God gave through Moses so that we might be led by God’s Spirit. Sometimes the Spirit is even stricter than the law. However, if we disobey we are not under a curse, but we may be disciplined in this life. Now we obey out of love and by the power of the Spirit (John 14:21). We may experience conviction for failing to obey, but never condemnation.

Consider: Christ redeemed us from the Law so that we could walk in the newness of the Spirit.

## 8/24 Galatians 3:24

*24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.*

Wealthy families of the first century often had an educated slave that would teach and care for the children. This tutor/babysitter would teach the child basic subjects but also instruct them in proper behavior. Until the child was ready to represent the father of the home, the guardian stayed by the child’s side. When the day came that the child was considered an adult, able to represent his father, the guardian was assigned another task.

The Law was given before the Spirit was poured out as guide to proper behavior. We could not receive the Spirit until Jesus atoned for them by His sacrifice on the cross. Now we can be justified by faith and receive the Spirit to be our guide in all things. He guides and teaches us in every situation, which is something the Law could not do. He shows us how to properly represent the Father.

Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to guide and instruct you? Jesus said that He would guide us into all truth (John 16:13). The Law is a good guideline in matters of morality, but only the Spirit can show us how to properly represent the Father in each unique situation we face in life.

Consider: Are you still looking to the old guardian to avoid a relationship with the Spirit? The law gives us the bare minimum of behavior. The Spirit will challenge us to let Jesus be Lord in all our decisions.

## 8/25 Galatians 4:6

*6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”*

The verse that precedes our verse for today tells us that in the fullness of time God sent His Son. It was just the right time in world history. Roads were built by Rome and ships were traveling great distances by which the message could be carried. The population of the world was about to begin a steady increase. Perhaps even more significant was that Israel was about to cease to be a nation.

God sent His Son to redeem those who were under the Law so that we could be adopted as sons of God. Because we are now sons through faith in Jesus, the Spirit of God’s Son, Jesus, has been sent into our hearts. He is our new nature. Just as Jesus called out to His Father while on earth, so we now call out to God as our heavenly Father.

*Abba* is Aramaic for “Daddy.” This implies an intimacy and trust like we would place in a good earthly father. We run to Him when we are hurting, when we accomplish something, and when we need counsel. We are proud of Him and want to be as much as possible like Him. We also fear His discipline. But we love it when He carries us on His shoulders or rocks us to sleep with a song.

Wonder! Almighty God is the daddy of every believer.

## 8/26 Galatians 4:19

*19 My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!*

The church in Galatia had been influenced by traveling speakers who encouraged the church to keep the Old Covenant worship rituals. Paul reminded them of the joy and passion of their conversion. They would have done anything for him because he introduced them to salvation by grace through faith.

Rule keeping is easier for our old nature. If we just go through the motions we feel we are right with God. Paul had weaned them from rule keeping to a living relationship with Christ that challenges us to change on a daily basis.

The goal of spiritual growth is Christlikeness. Paul felt as if he had to start all over again teaching them about the grace of God and the power and presence of Christ in us. He called it the “anguish of childbirth.”

If you have shared the gospel with someone and seen them slowly grow, you will understand what Paul was saying by “anguish of childbirth.” We watch the spiritual tug of war on their soul. We grieve when we see the old nature prevail, and at other times we rejoice when we see spiritual growth. It is especially difficult for us to watch a false teacher lead them back to trusting in the flesh.

Consider: How is the formation of Christ developing in you?

## 8/27 Galatians 5:6

*6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*

One of God’s covenants with Abraham included circumcision of his male descendants. It was an outward sign of an inward sensitivity to God’s words. Some of the early Jewish Christians believed non-Jewish converts should be circumcised. Paul argued that they were saved by faith in what Christ did, not on what obedience to the Old Covenant does or doesn’t do for us. Conversion is to cease to trust in our own goodness and place our faith in what Jesus did for us.

No religious ritual or custom counts for anything with God. God isn’t going to let you into heaven because you gave an offering every week. Religious obligations don’t count for anything. Only faith working through love matters in the eternal realm. If you gave your offering at the prompting of the Holy Spirit and you responded out of love for the Lord, then it has eternal significance but not in regards to salvation.

Jesus did everything necessary for our salvation and we can add nothing to it. If we are in Christ, by faith we can hear and yield to the Spirit and respond in love. God rewards our cooperation with Him with heavenly rewards. Faith working through love should be the daily life of a believer,

Consider: Seek to live every day in loving response to the One who saved you.

## 8/28 Galatians 5:9

*9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump.*

One form of leaven is yeast. It is a fungus used to make bread rise. One only needs to add a little to a batch of dough because it multiplies so rapidly. Until recent times, people kept a small batch of leavened dough from their current batch so they could add yeast to the next batch in the future.

The apostle Paul used leaven as an analogy to the false teaching that had infected the church of Galatia. Once one person accepted the idea that salvation was Jesus’ sacrifice plus our works, even one act of obedience, then others felt as though they had missed something. “You’d better be sure you are bound for heaven, so you should (fill in the blank).” and soon the whole fellowship was trusting in works to save their soul.

False teaching that promotes a trust in our deeds or elevates us above others because we do a thing a certain way feeds our pride. That is why it spreads so quickly. We are all vulnerable, as vulnerability to pride is a weakness of man. Jesus paid it all! Nothing can be added. Now we follow the Spirit as He uniquely leads each of us. One person humbly witnesses to everyone they see, another sets about discipling one person, another is painting for God’s glory, and another teaches in a secular school with the love of Jesus. Humble servants of God don’t promote their leading as the only way to live or as a sign that you are truly saved.

Consider: Aren’t you glad that Jesus paid it all? Aren’t you glad He didn’t make us all the same? Do what He leads you to do for His glory out of love for Him and watch out for leaven!

## 8/29 Galatians 5:25-26

2*5 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*

Keeping in step with the Spirit is our daily task. When we are expressing His fruits, we can know we are in step with Him (Galatians 5:22-23). As we grow in sanctification, we become sensitive to His warnings when we are out of step. We sense something is wrong. When we look to the Spirit to show us where we got out of step, He graciously shows us.

Keeping in step with the Spirit is most evident in relations with others. Our family is our elementary training. The church is our high school, where the tests are more difficult. And the world is our college where we find out if we got the basics at home and church. But our final exam is marriage and children. Then we learn there are selfish areas of our life we overlooked in our prior education.

We should be grateful for the gifts and abilities God has given us, but also recognize that God has given different gifts to everyone. When we acknowledge our weaknesses and the unique strengths and gifts of others, conceit, provocation, and envy have no place. Those attitudes are out of step with the Spirit who convicts us of our own sin. Those attitudes are contrary to the first fruit of the Spirit, love.

Consider: Take a moment to examine your heart right now and see if conceit, provocation, and envy have been rising up in you. Allow the conviction of the Holy Spirit to show you how ungodly those attitudes are. Ask for a fresh infilling of the Spirit, and then keep in step with Him.

## 8/30 Galatians 6:1

*1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

Each of us has numerous weaknesses that spring from our fallen nature. While some individuals are more prone to one over another, the temptations we experience are common to us all. When one of our brothers or sisters is caught up in one of those transgressions, they need the help of the more spiritually mature to restore him or her in a spirit of gentleness. Gentleness is an often overlooked fruit of the Spirit. Don’t mistake it for timidity. It is a heart that longs to restore the person instead of driving them off. While it is firm at times, it is also understanding, compassionate, and patient, just as the Lord is with us.

While helping the person get out of their particular vice, we should keep a careful watch on our own soul. How many pastors have fallen because they were counseling a woman who was having marital problems? If you are counseling an alcoholic, don’t do it in a bar. Know your own weaknesses and stay clear of opportunities to be re-entangled with them. If a needy person is caught up in a weakness you are struggling with, find another person to help him or her. We are not ignorant of Satan’s tactics.

If we think we are so strong that there is no danger for us from a certain temptation, we have fallen for the greatest trap of all, pride. The only way to counsel a person caught in pride is to watch out that you don’t do so with your own pride leading you. We learn many of our lessons in humility from our spiritual failures.

Remember: When helping a person caught in the trap of some enticing sin, guard your heart from that temptation. Gently but firmly help the person see what they are doing to their self and to those they love.

## 8/31 Galatians 6:7

*7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.*

This is a principle by God’s design, just as much as any physical law such as gravity. Our actions will have consequences. If we practice evil toward others, we can expect it to come back to us. If we sow kindness and grace, those seeds of blessing will return to us. The results of what we sow may not come from the same people into whose lives we have sown, but they will come.

God is not passively sitting in heaven watching what He started play out all on its own. He is actively engaged and sovereignly managing the results of our choices. Even this week I talked with a man who had just months before complained that he was constantly sowing good but nothing but bad seemed to come his way. Today he is reaping the good. Most people will not realize all the good they will reap until they stand before the Lord.

Do you need mercy and grace to be shown to you? Sow them! How about love and patience? Wouldn’t it be nice to have these come your way? Then sow them. In God’s perfect time you will reap. But if you sow to the carnal nature, you can be sure God will see that you reap corruption.

Consider: God has sown love, patience, and grace into our lives. He expects a harvest!

## 9/1 Ephesians 1:3

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.*

The word *bless* means to adore, to praise, or to cause to prosper. We adore and praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has prospered us in Christ. Then Paul uses another form of the same word to describe how God has prospered us. He has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. That is to say every spiritual benefit in heaven is ours.

It is a good habit to begin our daily time of prayer with adoration and praise for who God is and all He has done and is doing. It prepares our mind and heart for communion with Him. He is worthy of all our praise. We only see a small portion of all His goodness towards us, but we know there is so much more that we don’t discern. Praise is appropriate. If we did not praise Him, we would be showing our ingratitude.

If you are in Christ, you couldn’t have any more spiritual benefits than you already have. They are spiritual benefits like the love of God poured into our hearts (Romans 5:5), our heavenly Father hearing our prayers, the power of resurrection that transforms our lives (Ephesians 1:19-20), and gifts that enable us to walk in our calling. Certainly we should praise God for giving us every spiritual benefit in the heavenly realm.

Consider: Shouldn’t you take some time right now to stop and give praise to God for bestowing on you who are in Christ every spiritual benefit in the heavenly realms?

## 9/2 Ephesians 1:7

*7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace . . .*

Every one of us has crossed God’s line too many times. The justice of God demands that a penalty be paid for our transgressions. God cannot ignore evil. He must deal with it. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). That is how seriously God hates evil. We should be glad He does, otherwise heaven would not the wonderful place that it is.

Jesus came to pay the just penalty we deserve with His own life. Blood that paid our sin debt was His sinless life’s blood. Jesus came to redeem us because of the riches of God’s grace. Think of how great and abundant the riches of God’s grace must be for Him to come and pay for the penalty for our sins against Him. The One who hates evil to an extent we can’t fathom took the sins of the world upon Himself during the three hours of darkness on the cross.

If that act came out of the riches of God’s grace, how great that treasure chest of grace must be! When we think we are too bad for Jesus to accept us, we are correct. But then we get a glimpse of that abundance of grace that we have received time and time again. We realize God’s grace has made a way to be forgiven through the blood of Jesus. His grace will finish the work He started when we see Him face to face.

Consider: The last verse of a hymn by Annie Flint: “His love has no limits, His grace has no measure, His power no boundary known unto men; For out of His infinite riches in Jesus He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.”

## 9/3 Ephesians 1:22-23

*22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

After Jesus laid down His life in obedience to the Father’s will, He conquered death and hell and rose victorious over the grave. Because of His sacrificial obedience, God gave Jesus a name above every name (Philippians 2:9-10). He is Lord over all. Everything is under His feet, which means all is under His absolute rule.

He is also head over all things to the church. Denominations have their superintendents or presidents, but the believers throughout the world and time have one head, Christ Jesus. We are His body. The head directs every part in the way that is best. He should be our source of direction and purpose. While there are undershepherds called elders, they are servants of the head and serve the body in love, as the Great Shepherd directs (1 Peter 5:1-5).

Jesus is the fullness of God who fills all in all. God is present at once everywhere in time, space, and the spiritual realm. It is all of Him and for Him. The fullness of the invisible God is expressed in Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

Consider: Because Jesus is the head of the church, as His body we must continually seek direction from Him. Are you seeking direction from the One who has all things under His feet?

## 9/4 Ephesians 2:3

*3 . . . among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

We all came into this world spiritually dead with fallen Adam’s nature. Selfishness is normal for such beings. We are interested in God only to the extent that He can serve us. While some of us were predestined according to God’s foreknowledge, we had to experience conversion to be transformed (1 Peter 1:2). We grew up living in the passions and desires of our body and mind. We had to experience a transformation to become children of God.

The grace of God reached out to us in our rebellious condition and invited us to know life eternal in Jesus by receiving His love and the payment for our sins. That grace comes to all, time and time again, like the servants in the parable of the vineyard (Luke 20:9-18). Jesus, who is one with the Holy Spirit, comes to each person and pleads with them to turn from their path of destruction.

He alone can change us from being children of wrath to children of God. He alone can give life to our Spirit. The freedom to say yes to Him or to refuse His gift is ours to make. He won’t make it for us, but He does give each one the grace to see the decision he or she is making. There will not be a soul in hell that would be happy in heaven. Heaven is all about Jesus. Children of wrath are all about themselves. Worship of Jesus is the joy of the redeemed but is drudgery, even torturous, to those who have rejected His invitations.

Consider: Have you accepted His invitation to make Jesus your all in all? If so, worship Him right now for the grace given to you.

## 9/5 Ephesians 2:14

*14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. . .*

The Temple Mount had a large outer court the size of about nine football fields. Colonnades lined the sides and at one end there was a row of columns four deep across the entire width. It was from this end of the rectangular Temple Mount that most people entered. At the opposite end was the temple itself. Around the temple was a waist high wall. In the ruins of that temple a stone sign was found that was on that wall. “Gentiles who pass this wall will die.”

The temple was off limit to Gentiles. They could pray in the outer court, but under no circumstances could they enter through the temple gates. It was believed that their presence would defile the temple. This is the wall of hostility to which Paul is referring. The whole sacrificial system was for the children of Israel alone. Gentiles could go to a synagogue and hear the Scriptures, but unless they were converted and the men circumcised, they could not enter the temple to worship or offer a sacrifice.

Jesus ended the need for the wall. Since He became the sacrifice for the sins of the world, the whole sacrificial system was no longer necessary. When Paul wrote this, the temple was still in service. About a decade later it lay in ruins with the sign in the rubble bearing witness that Paul’s words had come to pass. In Christ Jesus, Jew and Gentile are one. Jesus has made a way for us both to be at peace with God in Him.

Consider: Now you can go to God without fear and present your requests to Him (Ephesians 2:18; 3:12). What peace we should have in Jesus!

## 9/6 Ephesians 3:10

*10 . . . so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*

The church is not a building or an organization or a denomination. It is composed of the individuals that have submitted to the lordship of Jesus. When people gather to worship on Sunday morning there are those who are a part of the church and those who aren’t. When people say they were wounded by the church, they usually mean by an organization or someone in it. Rarely do they mean they were hurt by the body of Christ.

These true believers’ transformed lives living in cooperation with the Holy Spirit show to the angels the various outworkings of God’s wisdom. Some of these people have an effect on earthly governments. Others affect the well-being of a local group of believers. Some will lead others out of dark destructive lives to lives of light and love. The angels are curious about the saving power of God to make rebellious sinners into devoted servants of God (1 Peter 1:12).

The fallen angels see the power and goodness of God and are assured of their final demise. The other angels are encouraged that God’s plan is coming to pass and know they will prevail. They see in varied ways how wise it was of God to plan the future as He did.

Consider: What message does your life proclaim to the heavenly realms?

## 9/7 Ephesians 4:7

*7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.*

God’s grace is poured out on all because of Christ Jesus. Many will reject that grace. It is like the loving instructions and gifts of a parent with their children. Each child will have the grace given to them according to their need. We need to give some of our children more grace than we give others. Any child can receive that grace or reject it and rebel against it.

Those who live in complete rebellion will most likely not receive gifts. But those who live in grateful appreciation for grace given and previous gifts will most likely receive more. Those gifts will be given according to each person’s individual calling and abilities.

At some time in life, the rebellious children may turn back and accept grace and become even more grateful because they realize to a greater extent how undeserving they have been. A parent may give them gifts the other children are jealous of and think is undeserved. But all gifts of grace are undeserved. That is the message of the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-31). Sadly, some children will reject grace given them until the day they die. A loving parent will continue their willingness to extend grace until that day comes.

Consider: How gracious has God been with you? How gracious should you be toward others?

## 9/8 Ephesians 4:19

*19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.*

Paul is urging the Ephesian believers to live differently than the pagan world around them. We are to guard our thought life. We should stay sensitive to conviction. All people have a God-given conscience, but believers also have the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Just as a person’s hand becomes calloused when he or she uses it to do certain kinds of work, so our hearts can become calloused to the pleading of the Spirit.

Those who remain in the pagan world become so callous that they end up as slaves of sensuality and impurity. Sensuality occupies their thoughts and actions to the point that they can never get enough. While thinking they are free and being fulfilled, they have become willing slaves of sin, running headlong to their own destruction.

Paul is warning Christians not to let this happen to them. Don’t compromise in the slightest way lest you become spiritually callous. Recognize the lie of Satan who promises more than he can deliver and makes you pay more than you ever imagined. Much of the entertainment world and the Internet promote his lies. Don’t watch his propaganda. Instead, feed on the pure Word of God so that you can grow spiritually strong.

Consider: Has some form of compromise slipped into your life? Do you recognize the danger of allowing it to continue?

## 9/9 Ephesians 4:30

*30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption*.

God has given every believer the gift of the Holy Spirit. We may not experience His fullness and power in our lives until we surrender fully to Him, but He is in us. He leads us on to sanctification by convicting and prodding us each day. He is getting us ready to be the bride of Christ.

When we ignore Him and walk in sin or neglect an opportunity, He is grieved. His sorrow is similar to that of a parent who is trying to grow a child up to have character. The parent is grieved when the child misbehaves, especially in disobedience to what the child has been taught. When the child neglects a wonderful opportunity the parent has carefully placed before him or her, the parent feels sadness. Perhaps saddest of all to a loving parent is watching a child go through a stage of total rebellion.

The Holy Spirit in us is grieved when we detour from the goal of Christ likeness. But He is pleased when we take steps of maturity and take the opportunities He presents to us. His grief and joy affect our own emotions. As born-again believers, we should experience times of sadness when we choose not to walk with the Lord and times of joy when we are obedient.

Consider: We should become increasingly sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s grief and joy as we mature in Christ.

## 9/10 Ephesians 4:32

*32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

As God has been toward us in Christ Jesus, so we are to be toward others. Think of the abundant and complete forgiveness you have received through Jesus’ sacrifice. It isn’t as if God has it in a lock box to bring out the next time you fall of the rails. God never says, “You did it again!” He forgives so completely that He never brings it up again (Micah 7:19). That is how we are to be to one another. Jesus even gave us a parable to remind us the enormity of the forgiveness we have received and His expectation for us to forgive others (Matthew 18:21-35).

There are other ways in which God expects us to be toward others as He has been toward us. Kindness should be our attitude toward everyone, for God has been so kind to us. He has been tenderhearted toward us, too. And aren’t you glad that is the case? Then that is how we are to be toward others.

God expects us to pass on to others what we have received. When we don’t pass on those good things we’ve received, we are acting in an ungrateful way and taking God’s goodness for granted. He will most likely discipline us to help us see what we are doing. When that happens, we often ask God why He is not being as kind as before. He is being kind enough to help us see what we are doing.

Consider: Are you giving out what you have received from God?

## 9/11 Ephesians 5:1-2

*1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

The verse just before our verse for today was in yesterday’s devotional. It told us to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving, because that is how God has been toward us. Paul goes on to say that we should act the same way God does because we are His beloved children. A good child should desire to honor his or her parents by imitating their good qualities.

The ultimate expression of God is love. To imitate God is to live a life of loving others. Jesus showed us how to do that by His daily life, teaching the truth even when it wasn’t what people wanted to hear. He spoke the truth to His enemies, even when He knew it would mean His death on a cross. He comforted the hurting and instructed His disciples.

The greatest example of love was His willingness to go to the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. In the Old Testament, animal sacrifices that were completely consumed on the altar were said to be a pleasing aroma to God (Exodus 29:18). Those sacrifices pointed forward to Jesus giving Himself up completely as a sacrifice for our sins. His offering of himself was a pleasing aroma to God because it was love that had him give up His life so that we might live. When we sacrificially serve others with the love of God, our service is a fragrant offering to God. It is to imitate the way He has been toward us.

Consider: Love motivated Jesus’ words and actions. They were a demonstration of His love for the Father and for us. To act out of the same motivation is to imitate God. May He ever help us do so!

## 9/12 Ephesians 5:10

*10 . . . and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.*

Paul had written to the Ephesians to live in the light. He explained that the fruit of the light is what is good, right, and true (Ephesians 5:8-9). Then he added our verse for today. We must try to discern what would please the Lord from among the many choices that are before us. Among the good things there are better things. Among the better things there is often the best thing. We could call it God’s perfect will. It would please Him if we went that direction because that path will result in the most good for the most people. It is consistent with His holy and just nature. It is an act of love. That often means it involves some sacrifice.

That choice of the best is not always clear or outlined in Scripture. That is why we have to make an effort to discern it. We make that effort because we love the Lord in response to all the love He has shown us.

Sometimes we have to test a path that we think is best. In doing so we discover God’s encouragement and the prompting of the Spirit, or we sense that it is the wrong choice. That is one way of discerning which choice is best (Romans 12:2). As we mature spiritually, discernment becomes clearer and the choices more obvious. That is why the wise counsel of mature believers can be helpful.

Consider: Our flesh would have us do what is selfish and carnal. God’s will never contradicts His Word. Look in the Word first. Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of a relevant passage.

## 9/13 Ephesians 5:14

*14 . . . or anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”*

Those who know Jesus as their Savior can repeat the apostle Paul’s words, “Once we were in darkness, but now we are light in the Lord (Ephesians 5:8).” We are to live in the light of Christ. He makes everything clear so that we see things as they really are.

Along those same lines, the early church had a chorus that they sang at baptisms. “Awake O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Before we came to Christ, it is as if we were going through life asleep. Our spirit was dead. We had no communion with God. We received no guidance from Him. We lived like animals gratifying our latest craving. Then the grace of Christ moved in us and we received life from Him, the forgiveness of sins. We woke up.

Suddenly, we saw everything in a new light. What we had relished before became abhorrent to us. New desires began to fill our hearts. The light of Christ revealed everything for what it truly is. Our eyes were opened and we began to see the depth of our depravity and the greatness of His love and grace. Now all we want to do is know Him better (Ephesians 3:19).

Consider: Are you still awake? Don’t drift back to sleep. Live in the light of Jesus today.

## 9/14 Ephesians 5:19-20

*19 . . .addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .*

The Christian faith is a singing faith. It makes full use of God’s gift of music. I can’t understand why any believer would constantly listen to secular music. We have so many Christian songs of every flavor that declare what God has done and is doing in us. They express our heart of praise, confession, adoration, and supplication to God. Most worldly songs are about lust or depression.

Paul was telling the Ephesians to start addressing one another with the words of those songs. How about walking up to a fellow believer, and instead of saying the typical, “How are you?” instead saying, “Great is God’s faithfulness!” or whatever song is filling your heart. We’d have to first allow songs of praise to fill our hearts so that it wouldn’t be just routine expression that replaces another habitual expression. And that brings us to the next verse.

We should always be giving thanks to God for everything. No exceptions are given. That is because we know everything will work together for our good (Romans 8:28). Even the difficult things help us develop character and build our faith in our all-powerful, loving God. The Lord has challenged me with the simple expression, “Always praise!” If we murmur or complain, we are expressing doubt. Replace that attitude with a song of trust in God’s goodness and watch your attitude change.

Consider: Think of the enormous difference it would make in our daily joy if we would just live these two verses.

## 9/15 Ephesians 5:26

*26 . . . that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word . . .*

God compares His relationship with us, the church, with that of a husband and wife. He commands the wife to submit to her husband because the church should submit to Jesus’ leadership. He commands the husband to love his wife because Christ loves the church to the point of laying down His life for her. That is God’s formula for a successful marriage.

Jesus gave Himself up for us to sanctify us. That means to make us holy. We could not be His bride if we were unholy. We could not be eternally with Him without holiness. He made us holy by taking our sins and receiving the just penalty for them. Now, He washes us with the water of the Word. The Word washes our thought life and convicts us when we stray. We stand on its promises and claim the forgiveness Jesus provided.

Husbands should lead their wives in the same way, sharing the Word with them. We can’t share it unless we are in it and it saturates our thinking. We should be leading the way in the knowledge and application of the Word, letting it change us first. Then we gently, lovingly share it with our wives, in the same manner in which the Spirit works in us.

Admonition: Men, take the challenge. Be done with lesser things. Commit to daily letting the Word speak to your heart.

## 9/16 Ephesians 6:8

*8 . . . knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.*

With these words Paul was exhorting slaves to serve their masters as if they were serving the Lord. Our verse tells us why. God is good. When we do good things for others, God will reward us. We reap what we sow. It doesn’t matter if we are free persons or slaves; it is still true.

Some people suggest the Bible is not opposed to slavery. During the American Civil War to free slaves, both sides quoted Scripture to back their reason for fighting. The apostle Paul taught that a slave should take any chance to be free, but if it was not given, then they should serve with their whole heart as if serving the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:21). Satisfaction and fulfillment are not found in our status or job, but rather they are found in our relationship with our Creator.

There is a greater issue in our lives than our employment. Every arena in life needs someone to show how that job or position should be served in a godly way. Other than doing morally compromising or substandard work, a person employed in any arena of life should show through his work performance the joy and contentment he has found in Christ. We are to be a light in the darkness of this world in whatever field of employment we find ourselves (Matthew 5:16).

Consider: Are you shining where God has placed you? If not, what needs to change so that you can be a godly example?

## 9/17 Ephesians 6:16

*16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.*

The word Paul chose for this shield of faith came from a word referring to a long Roman shield about five foot in height. The front of the shield was often covered with leather that was soaked in water so that fire arrows would not burn it. When a barrage of arrows would come down on the troops, they would find refuge behind these large shields.

We are to apply faith in the same way. The arrows of the Enemy of our soul come from various means but all have the same purpose. They are meant to destroy our life in God. When arrows of doubt, discouragement, or disappointment come, and they will come, we are to raise our shield of faith. We should wet it down with the water of the Word. The tar on those arrows may burn for a while, but if our shield is soaked well, it will die out.

Faith comes from the Word of God. It is bolstered by the experience of seeing the promises of God come to pass. We need to live in the Word and remember the works of God in our life so those arrows will not damage our faith.

Consider: Is your shield well soaked? You can be sure that arrows are on the way, so be prepared!

## 9/18 Ephesians 6:17

*17 . . . and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God . . .*

The only offensive piece in this armor of God passage is the sword of the Spirit. To make certain we understand, Paul tells us it is the Word of God. This is the tool with which we resist the temptations of the world, the lust of our flesh, and the assaults of Satan. We do use prayer, but it is prayer laced with Scripture and based on Scripture. It is not a sword of intellect, or the slower ones among us could not do battle. It is not of physical prowess, or the weaker could not join the fight. It is the sword of the Spirit, and every believer has the Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Jesus showed us how to use it against the Devil when He was tempted in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-8). He used it with His opponents to correct them (Mark 12:24-27). He relied on it in times of duress (Psalm 22; Matthew 27:46). Jesus knew how to wield the sword of the Spirit.

But let us not forget that it is the sword of the Spirit. Jesus spoke only what the Father taught Him (John 8:28). He did not wield the sword as He willed, but as the Father directed Him by the Spirit. We can throw about Scriptures as we will in our old nature and accomplish nothing. We must learn to wield the Word at the direction of the Spirit, and only then are we truly effective in this spiritual battle.

Consider: Warriors care for their weapons on a daily basis. They know their weapons and use them it at the direction of their commander. Get equipped. Get trained. Join the battle!

## 9/19 Philippians 1:12

*12 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.*

Paul was writing from a house arrest in Rome while chained to a Roman soldier. The soldiers would take shifts watching him. Meanwhile, people came to visit Paul and he would share the gospel with his guests. The whole Imperial Guard came to know that Paul was imprisoned because he believed Jesus was the Messiah who had come to save the world.

There was another reason Paul’s imprisonment was advancing the gospel in Rome. The brothers in Rome became bolder in sharing the gospel (Philippians 1:14). Paul set the example of willingness to be incarcerated for proclaiming the truth, which encouraged others to do the same. Paul’s enemies were preaching about Jesus to try to get Paul in trouble. Paul didn’t care, as long as the name of Jesus was proclaimed (Philippians 1:17-18).

Paul had learned to look for God at work through every condition of life. He knew God was sovereign over all things. Instead of complaining and being discouraged, he saw opportunities that he would not otherwise have. He saw the effects on others’ lives. He also encouraged others to not feel sorry for him, but to see the good fruit from what seemed to be a bad situation.

Remember: If you are walking with the Lord, the next time life seems to throw you a curve, look for God at work through it to do something that would not otherwise be accomplished. When we see God at work, our attitude changes and we are encouraged.

## 9/20 Philippians 1:29

*29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.*

I’ll never forget the time I was asked to preach on suffering to a church in the slums of Mumbai. How was an affluent American supposed to share with Christians who lived in utter poverty and who faced persecution from the other two more dominant religious groups? This verse was my text.

In preparing to preach on this topic, I learned that suffering is inevitable for all believers. Our convictions are contrary to that of the world. Our words and deeds will be hated. The persecution I’ve received was only words and a slashed tire. The believers in Mumbai face physical harm and removal from their meager dwellings. More believers are being executed for their faith than any previous time in history. We need to continually pray for those who live with the threat of physical harm.

The small room was packed; chairs were filled and children were sitting on the floor. I gave examples of believers in Scripture who counted it a privilege to suffer for Jesus. After all, He suffered for us. I told of the great heavenly rewards that far outweigh anything we experience here. I shared how this verse refers to suffering as a gift comparable to salvation, because it was for the sake of Christ.

At the end of the meeting a pastor with two small daughters came up and explained that the message spoke to his heart. He was going to ask for money for tin to build a space in the slums to shelter his family. The message convicted him that he should continue to share space in others’ shacks, as it was a privilege to not have a home for the sake of the gospel. I had to ask myself if I believed the message as strongly as this pastor did.

Consider: We don’t need to invite suffering. If we are true to the Word, it will come to us. Will you count it a privilege, as this pastor did, when it does come?

## 9/21 Philippians 2:3

*3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*

This should be the attitude of every believer. The witness of the church would be so much more authentic if it was consistently lived out. Instead, we have churches competing with churches and believers putting down other believers. The flesh thrives on pride. The Spirit thrives in the humble.

A story is told of a country church that was dying for lack of attendance. The three priests that ran the church decided to ask the local rabbi for any suggestions he could offer. The rabbi paused for a moment and said, “Jesus is among you.” He turned and walked away. The priests looked at each other wondering which one of them was Jesus visiting the others. They began to listen carefully to one another. They looked for opportunities to serve each other. They insisted that the other preach the homily. The church began to grow.

Eventually they realized that when they saw Jesus in one another, their attitude toward each other changed. Others could see humble service and were attracted. That is the way the church is meant to be. You are the temple of the living God (1 Corinthians 3:16), but so also is your brother or sister in Christ. Let us treat one another with that respect and love.

Consider: While every member of the body of Christ does not have the same function, each is necessary. Accept the contribution from each with gratitude.

## 9/22 Philippians 2:12b-13

*12b . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

The apostle Paul is very clear in his teaching that our salvation is an act of God’s grace received by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). There is absolutely nothing we can do to earn it. Jesus paid it all. But Paul and Peter both tell us to work at yielding to the life of Jesus in us (2 Peter 1:5-7). We come to salvation with all kinds of habits and patterns and must learn to let go of them and walk in the Spirit. We have to unlearn years of reasoning and habitual responses.

We do so with fear and trembling because we realize the consequences of sin in this life and how displeasing it is to God. This transformation is not something we undertake lightly. God is working in us, but we must work out what He is working in. At first it is not easy to act in faith. It takes spiritual discernment to see the difference between flesh and spirit. It is work to grow in the knowledge of the Word. It is a work of the will to yield to the prompting of the Spirit and react in faith to God’s leading.

When we do act according to God’s good pleasure, we are often rewarded with seeing the fruit that comes from doing His will. There is joy in knowing that by His grace we did what pleased our Savior. Responding to life in this new way is evidence of the free gift of salvation we have received. The eternal bonus is heavenly rewards for simply doing what is good and right (Ephesians 6:8).

Remember: Work out what God has worked in you.

## 9/23 Philippians 2:14-15

*14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,*

How the flesh loves to complain! If someone begins griping about almost any issue, we can chime right in with our own complaints. If someone cuts us off in traffic, there we go again. And when it comes to politics, we can never complain enough. This verse is telling us that those should not be the behaviors of followers of Jesus. Whatever we must do, we should do it without complaint. Then we shine like lights in the world.

Do we believe that God is sovereign over all things? And will the work before us be for our good, to build our character or to teach us endurance? Are we redeemed children of God laying up treasure in heaven where we will be eternally with our loving Lord? Then why should we grumble or argue?

Every generation is crooked and twisted. We should expect the world to be selfish and dissatisfied. That is man’s fallen nature. But it should not be the nature of the new creation in Christ. Our nature should be like that of Jesus. We never read of Him grumbling or disputing what the Father set before Him, even though it was the most difficult of tasks. He looked to the joy that was set before Him and endured (Hebrews 12:2). Ask the Lord to help you ruthlessly deal with your own whining.

Consider: Next time you are tempted to whine, praise the Lord instead. Ask yourself how Jesus would respond to the same situation.

## 9/24 Philippians 3:7

*7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*

Providence had dealt Saul a bountiful hand. He grew up in a university town in an upper middle class home. He was mentored by one of the best Jewish teachers of the time. His personality and intellect made him one of the up and coming leaders. Many a young Jewish male would have loved to have been Saul. But when Jesus appeared to him while he was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, he realized that all he had thought to be beneficial had led him to wrong conclusions. His heart’s desire was to serve God, but he found he was fighting God’s people.

To follow Jesus meant to cast his lot with rejects of the culture and give up all the benefits he thought were his. It is still the same in much of the world. Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and others will reject their own child if he or she should turn to Christ Jesus. I have heard the agony in the voice of those who have had to face that rejection for the sake of Christ. That often means being cut out of the family will and the end of any support.

In another sense, it is true for us all. Things we might have considered to be beneficial for us personally, we surrender to Christ for His glory. Our time, money, education, and possessions are no longer ours. We forsake them all in our hearts so that we may use those things at the leading of the Holy Spirit for His cause (Luke 14:33).

Consider: Jesus taught His disciples that they must let go of everything to follow Him. Is it any different for us?

## 9/25 Philippians 3:15

*15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.*

Apostle Paul was referring to the realization that we have a long ways to go to get to our goal of Christlikeness. He told the Philippians that he didn’t look back, but forward. He was straining toward the finish line. Then he added the words for today.

What was Paul addressing? There were two main issues he raised. One was the habit of looking back. Someone has said the idea in a different way, “Looking back is about would of, could of, should of . . .” The past is past. We take the lessons forward, but to dwell on the past keeps us from the task at hand. The best way to deal with yesterday is to ask what God would have you do today. What God did yesterday may not be His plan for you today. Don’t limit God.

The other issue Paul raised was the fallacy of thinking we have reached spiritual maturity. Pride can keep us from realizing how much more we need to grow. It can stunt our spiritual growth and get our eyes off the goal. If someone tells you the work in them is complete, ask if you may get their spouse’s opinion on that.

Paul concludes the thought by telling us that if we don’t agree, if we think we have arrived or we think looking back is beneficial, God will show us we are wrong. He doesn’t see the need to argue the point. He knows God can convince us. That is a good attitude to have toward believers who don’t accept sound teaching. God will reveal the truth to them.

Consider: The Holy Spirit is the One who convinces believers who will not listen to sound teaching. If someone won’t receive the Word, let the Holy Spirit convince them through experiencing how false teaching is denied by Scripture and real life experiences.

## 9/26 Philippians 4:4

*4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.*

The Holy Spirit through Paul was not telling us to rejoice in our finances, our health, our relationships, or any other transitory thing. He commands us to rejoice in the Lord. Isn’t it wonderful to know that the One who is of infinite worth will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5)? And because of His great worth and His love for us, He is the One in whom we should find our joy. All else is incomparably inferior as a source of joy.

We are commanded to rejoice in the Lord always, not just in times of worship or prayer. Christians should always have a deep abiding joy in the Lord. You may not be happy about a tragedy in your life, but you can still rejoice in the fact that our unchanging God who loves us will see us through and use the situation for our eternal good. Christians are the only ones who can have that deep joy in every circumstance of life.

Sometimes we say, “I am so blessed” when everything is going our way. But we are blessed all the time (Ephesians 1:3). We just need to open our spiritual eyes to the abundant spiritual blessings we are continually receiving, and then we can rejoice always. In case we didn’t get the point, Paul repeated himself. “Rejoice!”

Consider: We count our physical blessings. Take some time to count the many spiritual blessings you have in Christ Jesus.

## 9/27 Philippians 4:8

*8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

Thoughts come and go from the stimulus around us, but what we meditate on is our choice. We can accept a passing thought or reject it. Our challenge is to carefully guard which thoughts we dwell on. What you contemplate says a lot about who you are and what you believe. A fearful person will dwell on his or her worries. A workaholic will dwell on his work. An addict will dwell on his or her addiction. The Philippian church had two strong women who were at odds with each other. They were probably dwelling on their differences.

The Christian should dwell on what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely and commendable. That includes the nature of God and His work in our life. It is to think upon how He is working in the lives around us, in our church, and in our home. It is to consider what He is calling us to do and the fruit it will bear. It is to meditate on the Word of God.

This guarding of our thought life is only possible with the help of the Holy Spirit. That is our great advantage. He is constantly encouraging us to praise the Lord and reminding us of His goodness. We should be yielding to and welcoming that prodding and participate wholeheartedly in His prompting to dwell on what is excellent and worthy of praise.

Consider: If you are struggling with your attitude or with discouragement, this discipline will make an enormous difference.

## 9/28 Philippians 4:19

*19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

Some popular preachers use this verse to say that we will never have difficult times for lack of something. Only a few verses earlier Paul declared that he had learned the secret of being content in facing hunger or plenty, abundance or need. During his time of need in one city, the Philippian believers sent him gifts to support him in his ministry, but he was often penniless.

It seems Paul was saying that because they supplied him in his time of need, they would reap what they had sowed. God would provide for them in their time of need. That means there will come a time when they would be short of a necessity. However, they could count on God seeing them through and providing for that need in the perfect time.

That gives a different take on how we should understand this verse. First, we will all have times of need. Those times test our faith and help us learn to trust God. Secondly, there is a condition here of helping others. If we have been generous to others, then when we are in a time of need, we can know that God will eventually provide our need.

Consider: Our greatest need is already met. Jesus has provided forgiveness of our sins. The second greatest need has been met, too. We have His Holy Spirit to direct and teach us every day.

## 9/29 Colossians 1:9-10

*9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God*.

Epaphras had evangelized Colossae, resulting in a vibrant church that loved their fellow believers and bore fruit unto God. Paul wrote that he had been praying for them to be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. These were people he had never met, and yet the testimonies from this church had prompted his heart to pray for their spiritual growth. When we hear the testimony of a new believer or a new area where a church is formed, we should lift them up in prayer.

Paul prayed for them in this way so they would walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. He wanted to see them reflect Christ to their community, which would draw others to salvation. To live in a Christlike way would help them to continue to mature and be firmly rooted in God. That is pleasing to the Lord.

Knowing God’s will and living it out also means they would bear fruit in every good work and continue to grow in the knowledge of God. It’s when we reject His will that we begin to backslide and stop growing in wisdom and knowledge of God. Paul’s concern was to see them discipled and established in the faith. That is when the kingdom of God advances in an area.

Consider: We can pray this prayer for ourselves, as well. Ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that you can live in way that is worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

## 9/30 Colossians 1:11

*11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy . . .*

The Christian will face hardships and times of testing. Without these, we will never grow strong in faith. God allows the trials to come into our life for our eternal benefit. Paul’s prayer for the church at Colossae was that they be strengthened according to God’s glorious might. The very power that raised Jesus from the dead can be with us to face the times of difficulty in our life (Ephesians 1:19-20) We must rely on that strength rather than our own.

This strength that comes from the Lord enables us to patiently endure the storms of life. Patience implies that it may take some time. However, compared to eternity, every storm of this life is temporary. Paul calls them light and momentary (2 Corinthians 4:17). Considering the hardships he endured, he must have personally experienced the power he wrote about. The storms may seem so fierce that you cannot endure, but eventually the sky will clear and the sun will shine again.

Paul prayed that God’s power would not only help us endure, but would help us do so with joy. It is one thing to grit your teeth and bear it, it is another to rest in God’s power and trust in His promises. When you truly believe what you are doing is for God’s glory your ultimate good, you can possess an unshakable inner joy. It is a joy that we call “the joy of the Lord” (Nehemiah 8:10).

Prayer: I pray that you, dear reader, May be *strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.*

## 10/1 Colossians 1:13

*13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.*

The domain of darkness is becoming more visible as our culture declines. Being in that domain meant we couldn’t see the evil around us and recognize how destructive it is. We couldn’t see the glory and grace of Christ and realize how precious His attributes should be to us. We practiced self-destructive behavior and suffered the consequences, and then we turned around and did it all over again.

We notice that domain in the illogical arguments of the world. Things that are now obvious to us just can’t be understood by those still in the domain of darkness. We look at the same facts and come to completely different conclusions. Those in darkness simply can’t see what is right in front of them.

Now we are in the kingdom of God’s beloved Son. That means that King Jesus lovingly instructs us. He shows us the purpose for which we were created. He daily reveals Himself and His love for us to a greater extent. We can see a little more every day. What a blessing it is to be delivered! How we should long to see others delivered too!

Consider: Are you taking full advantage of being under King Jesus by listening to His gracious directions today?

## 10/2 Colossians 1:19

*19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.*

Some people have said, “If God would just show Himself to me, then I would believe.” God has shown Himself in His Son. If you desire to see God, you have but to look at Jesus, for the fullness of God dwelt in Him. God was pleased for that to be so because there was nothing impure or inconsistent in Jesus. He is God incarnate.

How else could He have rebuked the wind and commanded the waves, touched the lepers and made them whole, ordered demons to leave, or lifted a paralytic to his feet restoring his nerves and giving him muscle strength and balance? How else could He have fed thousands with a boy’s small lunch or have spoken healing to a manservant who was miles away, or have predicted the destruction of the temple? Who turned water into wine, caused one who was born blind to see, and called the dead to life? Who else has walked out of their own grave after three days?

Who would say such things as, “I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life (John 8:12),” or “I am the resurrection and the life (John 14:25),” or “love your enemies (Matthew 5:44),” or “no one comes to the Father but by me (John 14:6)!” Jesus said, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father (John 14:9).” Paul was simply agreeing with Jesus when he wrote the words of the verse we meditate upon today (John 10:30).

Consider: The only appropriate response to seeing God is to worship Him.

## 10/3 Colossians 1:24

*24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.*

Many people puzzle over the meaning of this statement. How could Christ’s afflictions be lacking? The confusion comes over the purpose of the suffering. Jesus’ suffering came because He was paying the just penalty for our sins in our place. Certainly there was nothing lacking in that suffering. His declaration of, “It is finished” could be translated, “Paid in full!” So what is Paul talking about?

The ultimate purpose of paying for our sins was to claim a bride. Jesus could only have a bride who is holy. While Jesus’ death on the cross meant that those who repent are forgiven of all sins, the bride, which consists of all believers, has a lot of preparation. Paul called it being washed by the water of the Word (Ephesians 5:26). As Paul proclaimed the gospel to the Gentile world, he was not only inviting them to be a part of the bride of Christ, but also teaching them how to live, preparing for that day we see Jesus face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12). He was persecuted for doing so.

The suffering that was “lacking” was that which believers receive from inviting people to belong to Jesus and preparing them for eternity with Him. Paul was a part of the body of Christ, and so are all those who share the gospel and disciple others. All who suffer for doing so fill up what is “lacking” in Christ’s affliction for the sake of His body, that is, the church. Paul said he did so gladly.

Consider: Think of what an honor it is to suffer for this incredible cause. Would you gladly suffer for the One who suffered for you?

## 10/4 Colossians 2:12

*12 . . . having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

Paul was trying to help the Colossians understand that all they needed was Jesus, Jesus plus nothing else. They didn’t need to follow any kind of works or traditions or rituals. Since the fullness of God is in Him and believers are filled with Him, what more could we need?

Some of the Jews were trying to convince the men to be circumcised. Paul was telling them that the important circumcision is that of the heart. Baptism into Christ is what changes our behavior. When our sinful nature is put to death with Jesus and is buried with Him, then we also rise with Him to new life by the powerful working of God. The old things we once loved we now deplore, and things we once avoided we now love. God’s resurrection power has transformed us.

Now we can choose to yield to that power moment by moment every day. The old lusts lose their appeal. The expulsive power of a new affection causes us to shun the old pleasures. We just want to live to please the One who gave Himself for us.

Prayer: Lord, increase my love for You, and help me to yield to Your life residing in me.

## 10/5 Colossians 2:16-17

*16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

Jesus is the fullness of God. The fullness of Jesus lives in everyone who has received Him as Lord of their life. His Spirit helps us to understand His Word and guides us into all truth. All the worship rituals of the Old Covenant were to guide us to Jesus. He is the substance that casts those shadows. Now that He has come, the worship and dietary laws of the Old Testament have found their completion in Christ.

God’s rules that set the Jews apart as the unique people of God are now fulfilled in a relationship with Jesus. His lordship of our life causes us to stand out as different but without the rigidity of rule keeping. Instead, His Spirit leads us as God would have us speak and behave in each situation we face.

Jesus is our Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:9-10). He is our sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 9:26). He is our scapegoat, our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14), the *Shekinah* in us, His temple (1 Corinthians 3:16), and our righteousness is of Him. He sanctifies our food when we pray (1Timothy 4:3-4). He leads us through the wilderness of life and into the Promised Land. He is the One that is lifted up that we might look to Him and live (John 3:15), healed from the venom of sin. Every day is a feast day when we walk with Him.

Consider: Man will judge you for not following religious expectations, but when you are walking with the Lord, you know you are free from the only judgment that really matters.

## 10/6 Colossians 2:23

*23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.*

Religion and rules alone can’t change the heart of a man, woman, or child. Think of some of the many programs designed to change one’s desires. There are rehab units for those who want to get rid of an addiction. There are self-help books galore that teach many different ways to change. There are numerous religious formulas and lifestyles that claim they will tame our passions. Most of these things sound like they would certainly be successful if we really tried our best to do them.

In the end, we find all these plans fail to change the heart. There is only one way to have your heart reprogramed. That is to go to the Maker and ask for a reboot. Beginning a relationship with God in humility and sincerity, through Jesus, can completely change our hearts. He will reveal the wrong motivations and the false assumptions behind them. Then He replaces those motivations with unselfish ones that are based in reality.

While we may struggle for a while with our old patterns, the love relationship continues to deepen, and we find the motivation of love powerful enough to override those old patterns with new, meaningful ones. The power to change the heart is only found in a relationship with Jesus.

Remember: Jeremiah predicted the day would come when there would be a New Covenant between God and man. He foresaw the changing of the heart through a relationship with the coming Messiah (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

## 10/7 Colossians 3:14

*14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

Paul had written to the church of Colossae to put off their old nature and be clothed with compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. He went on to tell them to forgive any grievances they had against each other. Then he added the directive we consider for today. Love binds all these graces together in perfect harmony.

If you’ve ever heard an orchestra perform or singers sing in four part harmony, you know the wonder of different sounds blending to make a much richer sound than each sound makes on its own. But if one of the instruments or vocalists is off key, you know something is not right. So it is with these gifts of the heart. If each does not operate out of love, it becomes obvious that something is off.

Kindness, or any of these virtues, can be demonstrated out of duty. When that is the case, others sense the lack of harmony. A person may seem to have genuine humility because of his or her love for God, but if he or she does not apply that love in patience toward others, there is a lack of harmony in the person’s actions and attitudes. This is why Jesus emphasized love for God and for others. It is the virtue of all virtues and harmonizes all good qualities. It is when we find that love for God and other people that others can see Christ in us.

Consider: Is it love or duty that motivates your compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and forgiveness? If there is a lack of love in any of these areas, ask the Lord to give you His love and be willing to receive it.

## 10/8 Colossians 3:23

*23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.*

The Christian work ethic has a productive influence on society. The idea is that we glorify God by doing the best possible job that we can do. One Christian group (the Shakers) took it to such an extent that their furniture and style is highly sought long after the movement ceased.

We must remember that many of the church in the first century were slaves. The influence of their work as unto the Lord got the attention of their fellow slaves and their owner, leading many to Christ. This makes all work a sacred occupation.

When we think of the Sabbath Commandment, we forget that it includes, “Six days you shall labor… (Exodus 20:9).” Though the curse included earning our living by the sweat of our face (Genesis 3:19), we can turn it into a blessed activity when we do so in a manner that glorifies God. Every area in which man labors needs a witness of what that work would look like if Jesus were doing it.

Consider: Do you think the carpentry or stone work Jesus did would have been inferior to anyone else’s work? His desire to please the Father in everything began long before His official ministry. What would working at your occupation look like if Jesus were doing it? That’s your goal, and for the same reason.

## 10/9 Colossians 4:6

*6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

Always means *always*. It doesn’t matter if we are talking to our spouse, our children, or someone antagonistic toward our beliefs, our speech should be gracious. It is even more important to speak with grace when the other person is raising their voice and being rude. A soft answer turns away wrath (Proverbs 15:1). If we are recipients of the abundant grace of God, it is our responsibility to pass that grace on to others in the way that we speak to them.

Salt was a preservative and added flavor to foods. To season your speech with salt would be to let the Holy Spirit direct your words. Let your words be truthful and lasting. That means we probably need to pause before we speak. Remember that even Jesus paused and wrote on the ground before answering His adversaries (John 8:6). Our answer should be something that will touch the heart and remain on the mind. It is never about defending ourselves, but rather about graciously directing others to truth.

Jesus sometimes answered questions by referring people to Scripture (Matthew 21:16). Other times He answered a question with a question that caused his adversaries to consider their motivations (Matthew 22:17). By studying Jesus’ answers we can see the best example of how we can answer graciously, “seasoned with salt.”

Suggestion: Do a study on the way Jesus answered questions in one of the Gospels; then practice applying what you learned.

## 10/10 1 Thessalonians 2:5

*5 For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness.*

One of the greatest detriments to hearing the call of the gospel is the injury done to others in the name of Jesus. When people call themselves Christians and yet operate out of greed, their actions inoculate those they wound against a saving faith in Jesus. Because of the painful experience, those injured by people using the name of Christ are reluctant to accept anything labeled “Christian.”

The apostle Paul declared that his testimony to the Thessalonians was working with his own hands to provide his needs. He had the right to accept an offering for his support, but he did not want anyone to think he was bringing them the gospel for personal gain. Paul did not use flattery to promote himself, nor did he seek personal fame. These are tools that hucksters use to abuse Christianity for personal ambition.

When you see a Christian leader demand a large salary, use flattery, or seek self-exaltation, it should be a warning sign that the person is either using Christianity for selfish reasons or has lost their first love. That person will appeal to those same weaknesses in others to draw them to be followers. For example, the self-exalting person seeking fame will tell others how they have the potential to be great leaders in their organization. The greedy leader will tell others how their giving will be returned to them tenfold from God.

Warning: Inspiring people who stir up others are not necessarily inspired by God. Know the warning signs. Remember Jesus’ and Paul’s examples. Genuine godly leaders are servants.

## 10/11 1 Thessalonians 2:19

*19 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?*

Paul had only been with the Thessalonians for a short time when he and his team had to leave (Acts 17:1-9). This caused them great concern for the church there. They wanted to get them back to disciple them in the faith, but Paul wrote that Satan hindered them (1 Thessalonians 2:18). The book of Job teaches us that Satan can only do what God allows (Job 1:11-12). The hindrance may have been for the Thessalonians to learn to go to God’s Word for answers (Acts 17:11).

Paul heard about their faith from other churches he visited. Before he could share about their conversion, others were telling him of the example the Thessalonians had become to other churches. If Paul had such little input, why were they then his crown of boasting before our Lord? Why were they his hope and joy?

Every believer should long to share their faith with others who will eventually surpass them in fruitfulness. Our desire is to have the world know about Jesus. When God works through us and we yield to His Spirit, the results go far beyond what we can imagine. These believers were Paul’s “crown of boasting” because they were evidence that they had seen Jesus in his words and life. His life in Christ had borne the fruit of a church that lived out their faith and touched the world with the love of Jesus.

Remember: Fruit comes when we remain in the Vine (John 15:5).

## 10/12 1 Thessalonians 3:3

*3 . . . that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.*

Paul had to leave Thessalonica shortly after arriving because of the persecution that took place. The converts who had just become a local church continued to be persecuted by the people of that city. The early Christians would not offer incense to other gods or pray to them, so when natural calamities happened, the town would blame Christians. Paul was concerned that these who were new to the faith might not be able to withstand the afflictions and would go back to their old ways. He sent Timothy to encourage and disciple them.

Our verse today tells us that affliction is a normal part of the Christian life. Some people promote Christianity as a joy-filled life of bliss. That is only half the story. It is joy in the midst of suffering, because this world is not our home.

All humans suffer in one way or another. The unbeliever may live it up, but then why do the wealthiest and the most famous take their lives? It is not enough to say it is mental illness. It is spiritual dissatisfaction. That is its own type of suffering that is meant to lead people to wholeness in Jesus. Believers’ sufferings are refining us and helping us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. It is our destiny.

Remember: Our light and momentary afflictions are preparing us for an eternal weight of glory to which nothing in this world can compare (2 Corinthians 4:17).

## 10/13/14 1 Thessalonians 4:3

*3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality.*

How do you know the will of God? What can one say is God’s will for their life? Here it is. Ready? This is the will of God, your sanctification. That means to be holy, which is to be set apart for God. In the verses that follow, Paul explains that he is talking about being in control of our body and not surrendering to the passion of lust.

The Greco-Roman world of Paul’s day was as sexually immoral and promiscuous as our own. When persons came to Christ, they had to avoid the local temples and change their behavior. Temptation was all around them. Even in the church, the new believers were tempted to use others for their selfish pleasure. Paul warns that the Lord will avenge those who do so (1 Thessalonians 4:5-6).

In this passage, Paul was focused on sexual purity, but the process of sanctification also involves our thought life, our language, the use of our time, and every aspect of life. God’s will is the dedication of all our thoughts and actions to His glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). All of us fall short of this, but it is His perfect will for each of us. In this lifelong process, opportunities to serve Him come our way. How effective we are in stepping into those opportunities is, in most cases, directly related to how far we have come in yielding ourselves to God’s sanctifying work in our inner and outer being.

Consider: Instead of wondering why God does not use us more often as His agents in the world, we should be asking why we have not yielded more of our thoughts and actions to glorify Him.

## 10/14 1 Thessalonians 4:9

*9 Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.*

Paul heard how the church of Thessalonica loved the family of God throughout the entire region of Macedonia. Their love went beyond the local church body and extended to all their fellow believers in the whole region. Does your church family love the believers in other churches of your town? Too often we hear of churches competing or slandering one another. That is unbiblical.

Paul went on to tell the Thessalonians to continue to increase in that love for one another. If we can’t love our fellow believers, how will we ever learn to love our enemies?

We can practice familial love on the one in our own fellowship that is the most difficult person to love. Perhaps that member’s personality or favorite issues rub you the wrong way. Pray for God’s love for that person and get to know him or her better. Get a vision for what the person will be like when the God’s work in him or her is complete. Some of the things in others that irritate us do so because God’s work in us along the same lines is not yet complete.

Consider: Imagine how wonderful our fellowship in heaven will be when you and everyone you meet is full of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

## 10/15 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

*11 . . . and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, 12 so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.*

Some people find a sense of importance by delving into others’ affairs. They talk among themselves about their neighbors’ or families’ problems and seem to feel the need to correct other people about perceived wrongs. Christians should reject these tendencies. We should avoid talk that incites to anger and violence. We are to aspire to live quietly and mind our own affairs. Our presence in a community should be one of peace and grace.

Societies can foster dependency so that they can control the masses. If we are dependent on our social order for our food, we can be unduly influenced by it. Christians should strive to be independent and support themselves. In another passage, Paul tells us to work so that we can have to give to those in need (Ephesians 4:28). Those who are on welfare should take every opportunity God gives them to earn their own way. Christian charity should be ready to help those who are in need through no fault of their own.

These descriptions of the Christian life are contrary to some views that are being preached and practiced today. The busybody sin hunter is not a new phenomenon. Know and love your neighbors. Help them when the need arises. But don’t interfere in their life or demand that the unbeliever live to Christian standards. The conviction of sin is the job of the Holy Spirit.

Consider: Walking properly toward those who are outsiders is to live an honorable and holy life in the eyes of others, but most of all, before God.

## 10/16 1 Thessalonians 5:8

*8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.*

The context in which we find this verse was Paul’s exhortation about the behavior of believers who were expecting the return of the Lord. Paul had taught them that the world would be caught completely unaware, but believers would be ready. That is because we are children of the day. We walk in the light. The world lives for the night where darkness hides their sin. The darkness prevents them from seeing what is coming.

Because the Lord will return and call His followers to be with Him, we should live in anticipation of that day. We should live every day as if it were our last. We want to be about the Lord’s business when He returns for us. We certainly don’t want to find ourselves compromising in sin when that moment comes.

That is why Paul exhorted the Thessalonian church to be sober. That not only means free from intoxication, but also to be serious about the time we have been given. We wear the breastplate of faith and love. The world sees us as a people of faith who treat others with love. Our head is protected with the hope of salvation. Our expectation is of that glorious day when Jesus’ work in us is complete. Each morning when we rise we should think that today might be the day. I want Him to find me faithful to the call He has given me when that moment comes.

Consider: Even if Jesus’ return is a hundred years from now, I may not have tomorrow. I must be about my Father’s business (Luke 2:49).

## 10/17 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

*12 We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.*

The role of pastor or elder has been a respected position in the past. We increasingly find that poor examples of humble servant leaders has diminished the respect that Christians should give to this role. Our verse today is an admonition to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you.

Having the privilege to associate with many pastors over the years, I could tell you numerous tragic stories of how they were treated by influential members of congregations. The average length of a pastor’s ministry to a church is just three-and-a-half years (Lifeway Research), but the most effective time of a pastor’s ministry to a congregation is from their eighth year. In many cases they aren’t allowed to stay long enough to be effective. The average length of a career in ministry is just fourteen years (Fuller Institute).

The pressure to deliver a moving message week after week, to be on call 24/7, to have a perfect family, and to oversee all the other affairs of the church can weigh heavily on a pastor. Insurance actuarial tables put the profession near the top of the list for health risks. Paul hints at the reason when he commands the brothers to be at peace with one another. Elders must intervene when there is discord in the church. Entering into personal disputes is almost always bound to end in someone angry with an elder. Yet, it must be done.

What can you do? First, as Paul admonished us, respect the elders. You may disagree, but do so cordially and without trying to build a coalition to thwart the leading of the elders. Secondly, esteem them very highly in love because of the unenviable task before them. And finally, be at peace among yourselves. A congregation that loves one another and quickly forgives one another is a blessing to their elders.

Consider: This is pastor appreciation month. Pray for your elders. The most heartwarming appreciation I ever received was not gifts, but cards from the congregation with a personal note of what they appreciated about my ministry to them. Pastors need encouragement, too.

## 10/18 2 Thessalonians 2:3

*3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction . . .*

Some of the believers thought that the return of Christ had already taken place. This troubled them greatly, for that would mean they had not sufficiently trusted Jesus to be their Savior. They thought they might have not been born again.

Paul told them that whoever brought this idea to them was a deceiver. Several things had to take place before the return of the Lord. The first sign is the rebellion. It is a time when many of those who claim to believe will reject the truth of the gospel and plunge into a life of sin. Jesus said the love of many will grow cold (Matthew 24:12). While we are currently seeing evidence of this time in the Western world, the third world is experiencing an awakening.

The second sign is the revealing of the Antichrist. Paul calls him “the son of destruction” because of his lawlessness and his opposition to anything good. Paul goes on to explain that will be a time when the Antichrist declares himself to be God and sits in the temple of God in Jerusalem. Paul assumes the believers will understand what is happening when it comes to pass (1 Thessalonians 5:4).

While it is true that believers expected Jesus’ return to be soon, they knew certain signs that preceded His coming had not yet taken place. We should live expecting Jesus’ return, but we should also be watching for these two signs that Paul taught would precede the Second Coming.

Consider: The important thing is to be ready by trusting Jesus fully each day and growing in the knowledge of His Word.

## 10/19 2 Thessalonians 3:16

*16 Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.*

Paul had asked the Thessalonian believers to be at peace with one another. His benediction at the end of the letter asked the Lord of peace himself to give them peace. He may have been thinking of the title Prince of Peace from Isaiah (9:6). Or he may have heard from Peter that on the day before the crucifixion Jesus said He gave the disciples His peace (John 14:27). Peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). When we yield to the Spirit we should be at peace within ourselves and with one another.

This peace was for “all times.” Anyone can be at peace when things around them are peaceful. When things are in turmoil it takes the peace of the Lord Himself to keep us in that peace. It is a trust in who God is and His power to see us through those times. It is knowing our destiny and the glory of it.

It is peace in “every way.” That means not only an outward calmness, but an inner calm, as well. Faith shines when situations are the darkest. I have experienced this peace and have heard from other believers of a supernatural peace that comes over a person when we look to God in the worst of trials. It is the Lord Himself sharing His peace with us.

Consider: We only find real peace in the Prince of Peace.

## 10/20 1 Timothy 1:5

*5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*

Paul had asked Timothy to stay in Ephesus to charge certain persons not to teach any other doctrine. Timothy was to tell them to avoid myths and endless genealogies, which led to speculation. People are always looking for something new to get excited about. The teacher that comes up with a new idea is puffed up in pride by the interest of others. Timothy was to tell them to stick with clear biblical teaching.

In our verse for today Paul is telling Timothy the purpose of the charge is that believers might be focused on love that issues from a pure heart. We can discuss the interpretation of Scripture and have differing convictions, but we must do so in a loving way. A pure heart does not desire to elevate oneself above others, nor does it demean those who have a different conviction. It simply seeks the truth with all humility and respect for others.

Paul’s and Timothy’s purpose was also to see that believers’ love operated from a good consciences. There is a temptation to win an argument even when we see validity in the other person’s points. A good conscience puts truth above the desire to sound superior.

The goal was also to see that believers’ love was lived from a sincere faith. If interesting teachings and secret insights were the only goals of some in the church, then they did not have a sincere faith. Sincere faith fixes on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is caught up in His love for us and our love for Him. Interesting peripheral doctrines take a back seat to the wonder of Jesus, our relationship to Him, and love for those for whom He gave His life.

Remember: Our goal is love that operates out of a pure heart along with a good conscience and sincere faith.

## 10/21 1 Timothy 2:1-2

*1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.*

Governments created by humans will always fall far short of God’s intentions; nevertheless, God has put them in place (Romans 13:1). Until the kingdom of God is established by Jesus on the earth, the kingdoms of man are a necessity. When they function as they should, they restrain evil by enforcing justice. Paul tells us to lift up prayers for them. Intercede on their behalf. The power that those in high office wield can corrupt them.

Pray that they have wisdom to make the right decisions for the sake of the people they serve. Make intercession for them that they not be corrupted by power. Ask God to give them right motives and to exercise justice. The more you dislike their ideology, they more you should be eager to pray for them to do what is right.

The reason that we pray like this is for their souls, but also so that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life. Decisions of rulers can add to national calm or stir it into turmoil. A quiet life gives one time to study the Word of God and to share the love of God with those he or she meets. A godly and dignified life is a testimony to everyone that witnesses it. In chaotic situations created by rulers who are a terror to their nation, the focus of the people turns from the quiet godly examples around them to ridding themselves of their ruler. Pray, so that the kingdom of God may be advanced by the quiet consistency of your godly life.

Consider: No matter how you feel about your leaders, it is in our own interest and that of the lost to lift them up in prayer.

## 10/22 1 Timothy 3:1

*1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.*

The words “pastor,” “overseer,” and “elder” are used interchangeably in Scripture. Though aspiring to be a pastor is a noble task, I have found that most people who ask for the title are unfit to take on the role. In the church, a leader is servant of all. The world often thinks of leaders as those who give orders and are served by others. Biblical leaders are ones that are spiritually mature enough to recognize the example that Jesus set of servant leadership. They serve the Lord first and the flock, which is the Lord’s body.

Paul goes on to list all the qualifications that they should have: husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, managing his household well, obedient children, thought of well by outsiders, and not a recent convert. That is a pretty strict list! Most pastors or elders don’t think they measure up to all these requirements, but their honesty about themselves is a sign that they are sober-minded.

Pastors and elders should be chosen because they are already doing the work of serving and teaching the flock, not because they are popular. It is the outward working of their spiritual maturity that is seen by the other elders that suggests they should be considered. Then they should be examined by the elders to see that they meet the qualifications and have sound doctrine. They may invite them on a trial basis to pray and seek the Lord’s direction with them as an equal. This was the way of the early church. We have strayed from it to our own detriment. The CEO style pastor who hires co-pastors as employees to expand the business of church is behaving in an unbiblical and dangerous way.

Consider: If one man is in charge of everything, who keeps him accountable and asks him the tough questions?

## 10/23 1 Timothy 3:16

*16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.*

It is thought that this was a song of the early church that confessed the faith that they believed. These fundamental truths about the faith helped them avoid error, and at the same time, it declared the already established victory we have in Christ. This is the mystery of the godliness of Christ that results in us living the godliness of the faith.

“He was manifested in the flesh” tells us that Jesus was all God and all man (John 1:14). All the fullness of God was pleased to be in His sinless, physical body (Colossians 1:19). “Vindicated by the Spirit” tells us that the Holy Spirit affirmed His life was sinless and perfect by raising Him from the dead (Romans 1:4; 1 Peter 3:18). His sacrifice for our sins was accepted by God. “Seen by angels” tells us of His ascension, where demonic angels were defeated and holy angels worshiped Him (Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 1:6). These three lines address His earthly mission.

The next stanza of three lines speaks of the results of Jesus’ victory. “Proclaimed among the nations” tells of the evangelization of the nations by the apostles and their converts. It continues to this day. “Believed on in the world” is the result of the message of Jesus’ victory bringing people to know Him as the Lord of their lives. Never before have more people turned to Jesus each and every day. “Taken up in glory” speaks of the place He now holds at the right hand of God as King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus has prevailed. He reigns! This is our faith. This is the truth we proclaim.

Consider: Remind yourself of these truths. They will encourage you to live a godly life and keep you from doctrinal error.

## 10/24 1 Timothy 4:7

*7 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness.*

The apostle was addressing false teachers that tried to attract followers from the church. These false teachers were trying to teach that godliness included food laws and celibacy. Paul encouraged Timothy to teach the truth that all foods are clean because they are sanctified by the Word of God and prayer (Genesis 9:3).

Paul went on to tell Timothy to teach the church to have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. In other words, just ignore the foolish fictional stories these false teachers share. Instead, train yourself for godliness. The word “train” is an athletic term. It means to exercise discipline to strengthen yourself to perform your best in competition. How is this different from the works that false teachers were proclaiming?

The false teachers’works were taught as a way to become godly. Paul’s suggestion of training is for the purpose of living out the godliness we already have in Jesus. Because He lives in us and because we represent Him, we should do spiritual exercises. Those include Bible reading, prayer, fellowship with believers, memorizing Scripture, and constant vigilance to walk in the Spirit so that our flesh is not given control. As believers we desire that the life we have within us be consistently represented in what we do and say.

Consider: How is your training coming? Athletes do it for a perishable trophy, but we practice our training out of gratitude for the One that saved us and set us free from slavery to sin (1 Corinthians 9:25).

## 10/25 1 Timothy 5:17

*17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching*.

The first thing we should notice is that it is the job of elders who meet the qualifications listed earlier in this letter to rule the church (Hebrews 13:17). Some things may be decided by a vote of the congregation, but the doctrine and worship service of the church is under the charge of that church’s elders. This is another area in which many churches have strayed. The spiritually mature men should decide the direction of the church by prayerfully seeking the leading of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-3).

The elders who serve the congregation well should be highly honored. While all elders should be able to teach, some are specifically called to the role of preaching and teaching. These should especially be honored for their work and labor of love. Pastors are the lowest paid professionals. This verse is telling us that should not be the case. I recall several churches asking me to disclose the minimum salary on which I could live.

Peter instructed pastors not to serve for the sake of their salary (1 Peter 5:2). In our day we see multimillionaire celebrity pastors. This is the other extreme. A good guideline is the Jewish practice that preceded the church. It took ten men to form a synagogue because their tithe could support the rabbi. That would mean the rabbi’s income would be equal to the average income of those men. Our verse for today tells us that is a minimum. Unfortunately, many pastors are expected to live on far less. If your teaching and preaching pastor is ruling well, consider him worthy of double honor.

Consider: “Do unto others as you would have them do to you” may be a good guideline for the committee that salaries your pastor (Luke 6:31). Pastoring can be a lonely and discouraging job. A word of gratitude for something you have learned from your pastor can be a way to show him honor and respect. Consistent attendance is another way to do the same.

## 10/26 1 Timothy 6:6-7

*6 But godliness with contentment is great gain, 7 for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.*

This is the formula for a fulfilling life, godliness with contentment. Paul gives Timothy a reason that backs this statement. “We brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.” Amassing material goods will not help your eternal condition. The Pharaohs were buried with a great amount of worldly goods. Those things are now in museums. We labor for wealth to bring security, but wealth can’t buy security from illness or circumstances.

Godliness benefits us now and in the world to come. It keeps us from the destructiveness of sin and gives us peace of mind about our inevitable death. Sin causes a kind of increased craving for things in this world. That results in constant discontent. But godliness results in contentment. Contentment in our circumstances is priceless and comes from trust in God who loves and cares for us.

When our satisfaction is found in God, we can appreciate the simple pleasures of life. We find pleasure in God and His goodness on a continual basis. We also experience joy as we see His gracious, loving hand at work in our lives. Whether we have little or plenty, godliness with contentment makes us the richest people on earth.

Consider: Are you experiencing this contentment? If not, it is often because we have set our sights on some physical thing to satisfy us rather than the only One who is big enough to fill us to the full.

## 10/27 1 Timothy 6:17-18

*17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share.*

In some Christian circles, it is almost considered a shame to be rich, and in others, people follow the prosperity gospel, which teaches God promises us financial riches. Both are extremes of thought about earthly blessings. Wealth comes with the challenge to not trust in wealth but in God. It can also tend toward pride. Yet it can be a great blessing when the possessor humbly seeks God’s will for the use of those funds. There is need all around us. The wealthy must use discernment to know how the Lord would have them distribute their wealth.

This verse has two sobering comments about the nature of wealth. It is wealth in this present age. It has no relationship with the world to come. And it is uncertain. Powers come and go and often take wealth with it. Someone is always seeking to con the wealthy out of their money (Proverbs 23:5).

The verse also has an encouraging comment for those of every financial status. We should place our hope on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. The best things in life are freely given to all: the beauty of nature, the love between husband and wife, the joy of children, watching the Lord move in our lives and in the lives of those we love, true friends, and so much more. Take time to enjoy and give thanks for all the good things God has richly given to us.

Comment: While the Christian life is often one of sacrifice, it is also one that deeply enjoys the goodness of God expressed through His rich gifts to us. Give God thanks for those priceless, loving gifts.

## 10/28 2 Timothy 1:9

*9 . . . who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.*

God saved us. It had nothing to do with our goodness. In fact, it was in spite of how bad we were. We may have tried to be good, but our works were all about looking good in the eyes of others. What an insult to the God who gave us everything we have so that we might glorify Him. Still, His mercy reached out to us and saved us.

He called us to a holy calling. He delights in transforming the vile sinner into a holy instrument of His love. He is doing this for His own purpose. It is being done in His patient love. And as we begin to live for that purpose for which He designed us, we find joy and fulfillment. We no longer have to focus on ourselves. He becomes the One we seek to exalt and glorify.

The amazing thing about this grace we have received is that it was ours in eternity. Because God inhabits eternity (Isaiah 57:15), our salvation and calling was ours before the world was made. He predestined us, and yet He gave us the freedom to choose or reject Him. His grace enabled us to choose Him. Only an infinite, eternal God of love could do such a wonder.

Praise: Thank you, Lord, for choosing to save me and call me to Your holy calling. Thank You for the abundance of grace I have received in Christ Jesus. May my life express my gratitude to You.

## 10/29 2 Timothy 1:12

*12 . . . which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.*

The apostle Paul suffered because he was appointed to proclaim the message of salvation through faith in Jesus. By declaring the truth of the gospel, he was challenging all other systems of belief. That would mean rejection and ridicule from most people, but salvation for many. It is the same today. If we declare that Jesus is the only way to God, we will face rejection by many but also see a few find salvation and life eternal.

The ridicule and scorn did not cause Paul to be ashamed, nor should it cause us to be ashamed. We know the One we believe. We know He is real, loving, and gracious. We know He can keep us from falling away when we face persecution. He enables us to stand firm by His power and not back down from the truth.

Jesus guards our hearts from the temptation to go the easy route. We are going against the current of this world. This is because this world is under the control of the Evil One (1 John 5:19). We are not ashamed of the message or the persecution we face. We would rather suffer for the truth and eternal glory than be comfortable with a lie and face eternal judgment.

Thanksgiving: Thank the Lord for the help He gives us in guarding until that Day what has been entrusted to us.

## 10/30 2 Timothy 2:13

*13 . . . if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.*

Paul shared with Timothy what Paul called a “trustworthy saying.” It began with the truth that if we die with Jesus, we are certain to live with Jesus. It continues with the promise that if we endure, we will reign with Him. That is followed by a warning that if we deny Him, He will also deny us. The saying ends with the comforting verse for today.

Those who place themselves in the death of Jesus, giving their lives to God as Jesus gave His in complete surrender are sure to experience the power of resurrection now and on the day when Jesus returns for His own. However, we must endure if we would reign with Him. And if we deny Him, deny that He is our Savior and Lord, then He will deny us. That is to crucify again the Son of God and hold Him up to contempt (Hebrews 6:6). This saying must have been a strong deterrent from compromising with the world system and saying that Caesar is lord to avoid persecution or death. What would you do?

Our verse today comforts those who would endure in spite of their failures to be faithful. Most believers at times find they are unfaithful to surrender themselves fully to the Lord. The old nature rises from the coffin and insists on its selfish way. But God is faithful to convict us and to forgive and cleanse us when we repent (1 John 1:9). We are a part of His body and He will always be faithful to Himself (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

Consider: If you think you can freely sin because you are under grace, you should fear for your salvation. If you are afraid your stumbling will send you to hell, you should trust the Great Shepherd to keep you.

## 10/31 2 Timothy 2:22

*22 So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*

The passions of our youth can form patterns in the brain that we subconsciously follow after we mature. The things we thought would bring pleasure temporarily satisfied us, so our developing mind laid a default pathway to resolving dissatisfaction. After maturity was reached, we find ourselves thinking in the same way that we did when we were young, even though we have learned the consequences are not worth the temporary pleasure.

Our verse today is telling us to flee from youthful passions. That means we can choose to do so. We are not “born that way,” without recourse. We developed that way, but that does not mean we have to continue in that mode of behavior. A kleptomaniac can choose to stop stealing. If we are born-again believers, the power of the Holy Spirit is available to enable us to flee from what once thrilled us. The same is true for any behavior.

Instead of just giving in to old patterns, we are to mature spiritually and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. That is what people with pure hearts do. The mind may have the old ruts but the heart has new desires. This verse tells us what to run from and what to run to. The power of the Holy Spirit enables us to refuse to cave in to the destructive ways of the flesh and choose to passionately pursue what is of eternal value.

Consider: The battle takes place in the mind, but it is won in the heart. Our relationship with Jesus causes our hearts to love what He loves and reject what is worthless.

## 11/1 2 Timothy 3:1

*1 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.*

The verses that follow explain why the last days will be so difficult. Paul describes the character of the people of that time as lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. He adds that they will be ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:2-6). What a description of the general character of people today!

Education in America was once the responsibility of the church. Atheist progressives, like John Dewey, saw public education as a means to remove godly instruction from the educational system. By influencing the training of teachers, the minds of future generations could be turned away from biblical principles. The result is the educational system we have today that denies there is truth. Man took the place of God in education and the natural results are the characteristics that Paul described.

The Christian character should be the opposite of what Paul described and will therefore shine by way of contrast in these last days. Instead of pride, we should demonstrate humility. Instead of lovers of money, we should be generous. Christians should stand out as grateful, holy, approachable, gracious, self-controlled, and kind. The godliness we proclaim should be obvious in our speech and deeds. Our love for God should be seen in all that we do.

Consider: Take a moment to consider if in any way your character is like these whom Paul described. What area of your life needs the transformative touch of the Holy Spirit?

## 11/2 2 Timothy 3:12

*12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

The first Sunday of November is a time when we remember those who have given their lives for the sake of the gospel. Therefore, it is appropriate that we would encounter this passage on this particular week. Paul praised Timothy for following his example and aim in life, even in enduring under persecution. It is inevitable that following Jesus will result in being persecuted. That is because believers in Jesus are resisting the prince of this world, Satan (John 16:11). We expose the false claims of worldliness as his lie. He promises satisfaction while leading to destruction.

The aim in the life of the believer is to glorify God. The world aims to please the fallen nature. If our words and lifestyles proclaim that living for selfish pleasure will end in destruction, we rouse the ire of Satan and those who don’t want to hear the truth. If we dare to say that Jesus is the only way to heaven (John 14:6), we stir up every false religion against us. But what else can we do if we know it is true?

Throughout church history there has always been a temptation to conform to the world just enough to avoid persecution. The child of God who continues to grow in Christ Jesus cannot continue long with compromise. The believer’s heart is increasingly filled with the love of God and therefore cannot remain at ease with compromise.

Consider: The love from God that fills and expands our hearts does not force us to act a certain way; rather, it transforms the way we think, which results in a change of behavior. The aim of persecution is to cause us to fear and doubt God’s love.

## 11/3 2 Timothy 4:11

*11 Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.*

This is a story about second chances. Mark had deserted Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Paul didn’t want to take Mark on the second journey but Barnabas did. So Barnabas took Mark and went without Paul, and Paul took Silas (Acts 15:39). Even contention between godly men can result in a doubling of the ministry outreach. God uses everything to reach people with the good news of His loving sacrifice for us.

Our text today is near the end of Paul’s ministry when he was awaiting trial in Rome, many years after that first journey. Most of the brothers have deserted Paul or gone to minister in other areas. To help a Christian prisoner would expose oneself to the possibility of arrest and imprisonment. Luke alone took that risk and faithfully took care of Paul’s needs.

No doubt Paul had heard of Mark’s faithfulness following his early failure. Perhaps the backsliding of others had given Paul a new perspective on those who stumble but get up and continue to serve the Lord. Now Paul sees how useful Mark is for the ministry and invites him to join him in what may be Paul’s last days.

Consider: We all stumble in one way or another. What is important is that we get back up and rely even more on the Lord. Perhaps you have refused to work with someone that failed you in the past. If he or she continued to serve the Lord, perhaps a second chance is in order.

## 11/4 Titus 2:11-12

*11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.*

Jesus is the outshining of the attribute of grace in the heart of God. The Greek word used for “appeared” means to shine upon or to make visible. The manifestation of grace that is the life of Jesus has brought salvation for all people. That does not mean that all will be saved, but rather that salvation is available to all (John 1:12).

This grace we see in the life of Jesus trains us to renounce ungodliness. That training is presently active in every living believer. It includes the discipline of the Holy Spirit and conviction as well as encouragement and joy when we listen and obey. We also give up worldly passions. “Worldly” means the ways of fallen man. This includes sexual temptation to use others, ambition to exalt ourselves above others, and to temptation to live for the body rather than the Spirit.

Instead, Jesus’ example of grace teaches us to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives. We see that Jesus refused to give in to worldly desires to rule or use others selfishly, and so we know that His life in us can enable us to do the same. The fact that we are in training means we will fail at times, but it also means we should be increasingly Christlike as we learn our lessons. Ungodliness should diminish as godliness increases until the day we graduate into His presence.

Prayer: Lord, please help me to receive Your training as I read about and experience Your grace and walk with You each day. Make me more like You, that I might live to the glory of God the Father.

## 11/5 Titus 3:5

*5 . . . he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit . . .*

Jesus told Simon the Pharisee that the one who is forgiven much has a greater love for the One forgiving him or her (Luke 7:47). If we want to love our Lord to a greater degree, we should see how much grace we have received. We may have grown up in a godly home, but we were still born with a fallen human nature. Every time we hear a testimony of someone who hit rock bottom, we marvel that God could change them. But what if you were born into that same home and circumstances?

It was the grace of God that placed you in that godly home and in the conditions that sheltered you and introduced you to Jesus. Did you ever consider that God may have planned it so because He knew if you were born in other conditions you would have never come to Him? Jesus died for each and every soul regardless of how “good” or depraved. That grace of His sacrifice in our place was the same for the murderer as it was for you and me. Every soul that comes to Jesus has received immeasurable mercy. Some just have more difficulty seeing it.

That same mercy washes us with the Word, regenerating our mind to hate the evil and love the good. The Holy Spirit renews our very nature to desire the Word and to long to be used by God for His glory. That, too, is mercy upon mercy. We didn’t come up with it out of our own goodness. Our righteousness is from our Lord.

Prayer: Lord, please open my eyes to how great and loving your mercy upon me has been and continues to be so that I might love You more.

## 11/6 Titus 3:10-11

*10 As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, 11 knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.*

Churches are often targets of egocentric people seeking people to adore them. That is because most churches are small and gentle in the way they deal with people. Wolves dressed in sheepskins come in among the flock and attempt to take it over or attract people to themselves. They are often smart enough to wait until they endear themselves to a number of influential people before they begin to sow division.

Sometimes the division they sow is obvious false doctrine. The more subtle ones simply put forth a different conviction about interpretation. Differences in interpretation of issues other than who Jesus is and what He has done for us are normal and for the most part tolerated. But when their difference in doctrine becomes their central issue and our unity in Christ takes a back seat, then destructive division raises its ugly head. People begin to take sides. The new faction demands that people choose for or against them. Untrue comments or exaggerations are made. And finally, the pastor is forced to leave in spite of the elders’ stand or else the church splits.

When the elders spot such a wolf, the elders need to warn him or her. Give the person another chance. Perhaps the wolf will recognize his or her carnal tendency. Perhaps the elders have misinterpreted the person’s intent. But when it continues and escalates, the elders must act to remove the divisive person from fellowship before more damage is done. Those who leave will make horrible accusations about the elders, but the unity of the church will be saved.

Consider: This type of situation puts your elders in a difficult spot. They must explain to those who want to know why the action was made and clarify the slander spoken about them without sinking to the level of the wolf or exposing confidential conversations. Pray for your elders and remember this passage. It happens all too frequently in churches today.

## 11/7 Philemon 1:14

*14 . . .but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord.*

Philemon was a friend of the apostle Paul and most likely one of Paul’s converts. He was the master of a household with slaves. One of those slaves ran away to be with Paul. Paul convinced the slave to return and carry with him a letter from Paul to Philemon. The letter encouraged Philemon to receive the slave as a brother in Christ and forgive him. If there was any loss because of his absence, Paul promised to pay the debt.

In this brief letter we can see how God expects us to deal with worldly situations. Paul did not teach revolution against the practice of slavery, but rather that being in Christ changed the way it functioned. The slave should work as if he was working for the Lord (Ephesians 6:5-6). His testimony of faithfulness and hard work might win the ear of his owner so that he, too, would be converted. The owner who became a believer was to treat his slaves as people made in the image of God (Ephesians 6:9).

This change in attitude was what ended slavery. When Europe was Christianized, the churches had to decide if they would let slaves partake in Communion. When they decided they could, the logical outworking of that was that slaves were people with rights and not mere property.

We can also see in this letter how Paul tries to persuade Philemon to do what is right rather than use his apostolic authority to order him. He uses reason and persuasion. So we, too, should urge younger believers by loving persuasion rather than compelling them to make changes in their lives.

Consider: Paul’s counsel to Philemon is especially relevant to how we teach our children and grandchildren to walk with the Lord. Take a moment to read the short letter of Philemon, and see how Paul used his relationship with him to encourage him to do the godly thing.

## 11/8 Hebrews 1:14

*14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?*

The first chapter of Hebrews shows us from Scripture that Jesus is superior to all angels. The angels who did not fall worship Jesus, the Son of God. The chapter closes with our verse for today, which explains that angels are ministering spirits. Their assigned task is to serve those who will inherit salvation. Jesus’ name means “the salvation of God.” The angels serve those who will inherit Jesus.

This tells us that there are angels assisting those whom God has chosen, those who by their free will and the grace given them will receive Jesus as the Lord of their lives. These angels usually serve in an unseen way. That is because they know all glory should go to the Lord. Man will readily worship a greater power, but angels are not to be worshiped (Revelation 19:10). They point us to Jesus, the One who should be worshiped.

Many believers can testify of strange incidences in their lives when the only explanation for what took place was angelic assistance. If Satan is out to destroy the saints, then we certainly need divine intervention at times (John 10:10). While we do not need to focus on angels and their assistance, we should thank the Lord for His faithfulness to protect us from evil by whatever means He chooses. It only took one of them to destroy 185,000 warriors of the Assyrian army, saving the city of Jerusalem and the ancestors of Jesus (2 Kings 19:35).

Consider: Why should we fear any circumstance when we know these servants of God are on duty?

## 11/9 Hebrews 2:1

*1 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.*

The Laws of Moses were delivered to Israel by angels (Deuteronomy 33:2; Acts 7:53). When the people of Israel chose to ignore the Law they were justly punished. So what will happen to us if we ignore the words of the One who the angels worship? He declared the message of heaven. It was proclaimed by His disciples. God confirmed it was the truth by signs and wonders at the apostles’ hands.

This is why our verse for today tells us we must pay much closer attention to this gospel we have heard. “Pay much closer attention” can also be translated “devoted.” It was a word used to describe the careful attention the priest should give to service at the altar (Hebrews 7:13). The instruction is followed by a warning that if we don’t do so, we may drift from it.

This expression was used for mooring boats. If a boat was not securely tied to the dock, it could drift away and be smashed on the rocks of the shore. The author is telling us that kind of destruction is analogous to a life that is casual about the words of Jesus. Devoting ourselves to His message is the difference between security and destruction. Being secure in Him is more than a one-time acknowledgment of the truth that He is the way to God. Without paying much closer attention to what we have heard, we are in danger of drifting away.

Consider: One way we can do this by memorizing and contemplating the words of Jesus in the Gospels.

## 11/10 Hebrews 3:13

*13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

Our senses are continually assaulted with the message of the world. Commercials tell us that we will be happy and desirable if we just use their product. Entertainment often sends the message that the perfect person is out there just waiting for you to find him or her. Our flesh seeks temporal fulfillment in things that promise way more than they can deliver. Sin is deceitful. That is why we need to exhort one another every day.

When you run into a brother or sister in Christ, ask the person what God is showing them today. Share with them what God has put on your heart, or a Scripture God brings to mind. Encourage those you meet. Give that person who looked downcast a phone call and see how you might help cheer him or her up. Remind them of the blessings of God in their life. Don’t wait until tomorrow. Do it today.

If you see a brother or sister in Christ who has fallen for the deceitfulness of sin, gently and lovingly remind that fellow believer of the consequences of following that path. Remind the person how much more fulfilling and adventurous it is to walk in the Spirit. Offer to help them make the change.

Consider: Soldiers in battle rely on the resources and support of one another. We are in the greatest battle of all. Take the initiative to offer or ask for support.

## 11/11 Hebrews 4:10

*10 . . . for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.*

Many of the accounts under the Old Covenant were pictures with future implications. One such picture is the law of the Sabbath. Because God rested on the seventh day of creation, the people of Israel were also to do no work on the seventh day. The author of Hebrews is telling us that by entering into Christ, we cease from our own works of trying to earn God’s favor and rest in what Jesus has done for us.

In Jesus, we perpetually live in the Sabbath rest. This is why some early believers no longer set aside the Sabbath as a day of rest but considered every day as a day of rest. (See Romans 14:5.) That does not mean they sat around and did nothing, but rather what they did they did to the glory of God by His presence within them.

There is nothing you can do to make God love you more. There is no future failure that will cause God to love you less. God loves you because you are in His Son, who clothes you in His righteousness. That does not cause us to be careless in the way that we live. It inspires us to live out of love for Him who loves us and gave Himself for us.

Consider: Genuine believers want to please God in all they do because Jesus has made us God’s children. Our passion to live a holy life is evidence of the work Jesus has done in and for us. We let Him do that work through us by His power as we rest in Him.

## 11/12 Hebrews 5:8

*8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.*

Throughout eternity Jesus had never had to obey anyone. His desires and the Father’s were one. The universe obeys Him. Only rebellious man and fallen angels dare disobey. But in the incarnation Jesus had to grow as a man. He grew in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52). With each temptation His obedience taught Him the value and importance of obeying the Father.

As He grew, the temptations increased. While suffering hunger and thirst in the wilderness He faced Satan’s best shots and remained obedient to the Father. In the Garden of Gethsemane He faced the suffering of His soul as He looked at the torture He was about to face. He remained obedient.

Then came the torture of that last day. The suffering was more than we can comprehend. But worst of all was the separation from the Father in those three hours of darkness. Hell did its best to break Him, but He remained obedient. The God-man suffered but remained surrendered to the Father’s will. That greatest of all victories, the victory over death and hell, taught Him and us all that the blessing of obedience far outweighs the suffering that we may endure.

Consider: We, too, learn obedience through our suffering, though in our case, we often learn it through the suffering that results from disobedience. But let us learn from Jesus, as well, and follow His example of trusting, faithfulness, and surrendering our will to the Father.

## 11/13 Hebrews 5:14

*14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*

The author of Hebrews was lamenting the fact that the recipients of the letter were still needing to learn the basics of what God has revealed to us. They should have grown into being able to teach others, but instead they still needed to be taught. Like a baby needing milk, they needed the easy-to-understand essentials of salvation. Up to this point they had not listened well.

The author was longing to go on to more life-transformative teaching, but that required the learner to have spiritual teeth. It required that their discernment of good and evil be developed through constant practice. If they were not able to distinguish good from evil, they could take the meatier doctrines into unintended directions. That is how many cults have originated.

This verse tells us that if we want deeper teachings, we must train our powers of discernment with constant practice. Be sensitive to how the Holy Spirit leads you. Learn from the fruit of each experience. Watch for the signs and patterns of both good and evil to train yourself. That is a major part of maturing in Christ. As you mature, you will become ready for deeper teachings from the Word.

Consider: Our flesh resists training in discernment because its freedom is restrained. Freedom to submit to the Spirit is true freedom.

## 11/14 Hebrews 6:19

*19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain*.

Our verse today is referring to a messianic psalm, Psalm 110. In that psalm, God made a promise that the Messiah will be a priest forever. He backed it with an oath that He would never change His mind. The author of Hebrews was telling us that we can count on Jesus’ intercession with the Father on our behalf. Jesus is presently in the Holy of Holies in heaven with the receipt for our redemption, which is His scars.

God cannot lie. His promise and oath is our sure and steadfast anchor for our souls. Just as an anchor holds a ship from drifting into the rocks on the shore, so Jesus’ presence before God holds us in right standing in God’s eyes. You may be tested and fail. You may stumble in your spiritual journey, but you can know Jesus is interceding for you. He is our anchor fixed in the Holy of Holies.

Because of this assurance, we don’t wallow in guilt or condemnation. Instead, we learn from our failures and depend on Jesus even more. His grace and love invite our hearts to love Him more and more. Our gratitude continually grows. He increasingly becomes our all in all.

Consider: Take a moment to think about this great promise. Jesus is interceding for you now and forever!

## 11/15 Hebrews 8:13

*13 In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*

The author of Hebrews quoted Jeremiah the prophet’s prediction of a New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Jeremiah foretold that it would be different from the Old Covenant that the Jews did not keep. This New Covenant would be written in their hearts. The author of Hebrews quoted this to remind the people that the concept of a New Covenant ushered in by Jesus was not a new idea but was in keeping with the predictions of the prophets.

If those prophets predicted a new covenant, it would supersede the old one and make it obsolete. The author of Hebrews then made a prediction of his own. He said the old was ready to vanish. When he wrote the letter, the temple practices were still in operation. The priests were still offering sacrifices, but a short time later the temple was destroyed by the Romans. Sacrifice according to the Old Covenant has not taken place since that time. This confirms that what Jeremiah was teaching about the new replacing the old is correct.

We no longer come to God by sacrifices in one special location. Jesus has given Himself, the only sacrifice for sins acceptable to God. He fulfilled the Old Covenant for us. Now we can come to God through Him wherever and whenever we choose. The teaching of the Old Testament is still full of rich truths that we should study, but the system of worship through sacrifice by the Levitical priesthood is obsolete.

Consider: People have always come to God by faith. The Old Covenant saints looked forward to Jesus through the sacrifices. The Old Covenant was a picture of what was to come. When the New came, God sovereignly allowed the Old to be destroyed. Are you enjoying the privilege the New Covenant affords by coming to God through Jesus every day?

## 11/16 Hebrews 9:27-28

*27 And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, 28 so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.*

Sometimes we can become dogmatic about expressions in Scripture that we misinterpret. Some people use our passage today to prove that all people who claim to have died and returned are liars, in spite of the medical evidence. Is the author of these verses describing a general God appointed pattern or an inviable law? His point is that Jesus only needed to die once and will come again for us.

We can easily see that this is not a law by considering the numerous people in Scripture who were raised from death. Jesus raised three people. Paul and Elijah each brought a dead person back to life. Death is the general rule, but even that is not the case with Elijah and Enoch. Be cautious about arguing outside the main point of a passage. Arguing about minor issues is rarely fruitful (Philippians 2:14).

The author is telling us the work of Christ bearing our sin was completed upon His death. Nothing else is needed. He never needs to pay that price again. It was a once and for all act. It covered all past, present, and future sins. He will return to receive those of us who are eagerly waiting for Him.

Consider: Are you eagerly waiting for His return? It is a sign of your heart’s dedication to Him above everything else in this world.

## 11/17 Hebrews 10:23-24

*23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,*

Everyone who has trusted in Jesus has confessed that He is Lord over all. That implies that one day He will finish the work He started in us and rid the world of all evil. The author of this verse is telling us to not lose that vision. Hang on tightly to that hope all your days. It is a source of encouragement and confidence.

The reason we can hold on to that hope as the world gets darker is that the One who made the promises is faithful. He has the desire and the power to bring it about in His perfect time. He has a history of keeping every promise He has made.

While we wait for Him to do what we cannot do, we should be watching for opportunities to stir ourselves and others to love. Love is the testimony of the believer. If we have God’s love, we will show it in good works. That often results in an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus’ salvation and the glorious future He has for those who are in Him.

Consider: How can you stir yourself and others to love and good works today? How can put this into practice every day?

## 11/18 Hebrews 11:10

*10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.*

God called Abraham out of a city of culture and idolatry. He sent him to a far off land as a herdsman. This land was what became known as the Promised Land. There were large cities in it, such as Sodom, but they were not what Abraham was seeking. He was offered the riches of Sodom, but that also was not what he was after. He saw the cities of the Philistines and Egypt, but these did not meet his criteria, either.

As a sojourner in the land, he was seeking an eternal city. Sodom was destroyed. The powers of the world would destroy the cities of great cultures. Where was the city with real foundations that was designed and built by God? Where could he find an undefiled city that glorified God rather than man? Where could he settle without fear and know he was home?

The Bible closes with John the Beloved seeing a vision of a radiant city coming down from heaven. It is the bride of the Lamb, the people of God made holy. God’s work in them is complete and they are like Jesus (Romans 8:29). John notes that these walls have foundations (Revelation 21:14). This city is where we can dwell safely. This is an eternal city, designed and built by God. To every person that knows the forgiveness found in the cross of Jesus, this is home.

Consider: Are you looking forward, like Abraham, to this city? Fellowship with the Lord and believers is just a foretaste of our heavenly home.

## 11/19 Hebrews 11:13

*13 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.*

This chapter of the Bible teaches us about the faith of those who have gone before us. They believed God and obeyed in spite of the resistance they received from others. They were nonconformists. Though they did not have the written Word, or the knowledge of Jesus, or have the company of the church, or see that city that has foundations (see yesterday’s devotional), they still persevered in following God.

Though they died without seeing what God promised, they saw all that was promised “and greeted them from afar.” Their eyes of faith saw the heavenly city where righteousness dwells. Their hearts were set on heavenly things, and they refused to be satisfied with what the world offers. That set them apart and made them a target.

The faithful people of this chapter recognized that they were made for more than what this world offers. They did not feel at home here, for they longed to be with God in the heavenly city. They acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Is that how you feel about this life? Or are you seeking to be satisfied in this world? Where we set our hearts tells us the real condition of our faith.

Consider: Where do you call home? The trials of life seem less significant when our eyes of faith see the promises from afar.

## 11/20 Hebrews 11:19

*19 He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.*

God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice the son of his old age. At the time, other religions of the area sacrificed their children to show their dedication to their gods. God had previously promised Abraham that through his son Isaac would come descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. Abraham reasoned that God would keep that promise by raising Isaac from death. God stopped Abraham before he could lower the knife and provided a ram for a sacrifice. Abraham had passed a great test of faith.

Abraham’s belief in resurrection was not the only one we find in the in the Scriptures. Job believed that after his body decayed in the earth, he would see God (Job 19:26). Elijah and Elisha each raised a boy from death by the power of God (1 Kings 17:22; 2 Kings 4:35). King David predicted Jesus (“your holy One”) would rise from death (Psalm 16:10). Isaiah predicted the same (Isaiah 53:10-12). Jesus raised three people from death during the years of His earthly ministry. The most significant of them was Lazarus (John 11:43-44). Jesus was the first to rise to a transformed body (1 Corinthians 15:20).

God greatly blessed Abraham’s faith, which trusted that God would keep His word even if it meant raising Isaac from death. We also believe by faith that God will raise up our bodies, transforming them into eternal dwellings. We join a long line of people of faith who trust God for a future bodily resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). You will see those loved ones who have gone before you. Your own eyes will see your Savior and King.

Consider: Most people believe this life is all there is. It is no wonder they are so depressed and try to satisfy themselves with the things of the world. We have the glorious hope of resurrection and the sure Word of God that guarantees it!

## 11/21 Hebrews 11:35

*35 Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.*

What a contrast this verse presents to us! What greater relief could a mother experience in this life than to have her son raised from death? But God does not always answer prayer in the way that we would hope. The Christian life is not always a happy, easy road. Our eternal condition is much more important than our temporal one here and now. God is preparing us for eternity through the experiences He allows to come our way.

Christian history is filled with accounts of those who died refusing to renounce Christ. The Enemy of our soul hates our allegiance to Jesus and will do anything to break us. God uses those tests to strengthen us and others who hear about our stand. Our endurance also gives our just God a reason to reward us to a greater extent when we stand before Him in eternity.

Jesus faced far worse than most of us ever will. He could easily have stopped the torture inflicted on Him (Matthew 26:53), but He chose to endure it for our salvation. Surely He will give us the grace to face whatever He allows the Enemy to inflict on us. When you are faced with hardship, lean on the One who has faced it before and endured to the greatest victory ever attained. He can give you the strength to endure.

Remember: Our eternal state is far more important than our temporal happiness. Sometimes God does not answer our prayers because He has something better in mind for us.

## 11/22 Hebrews 12:5

*5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.”*

Loving fathers discipline their children. How much more will our heavenly Father, who is love, discipline us when we refuse to listen? Unlike our earthly fathers, our heavenly Father sees all that we do and knows every thought. The discipline upon King David was the loss of the baby born to Bathsheba and a rebellion led by Absalom (2 Samuel 12:23; 2 Samuel 15:13). King Uzziah was afflicted with leprosy for presuming to do what only the priests were allowed to do (2 Chronicles 26:19).

I can recall times of the Lord’s discipline when I strayed from Him. I’ve seen the discipline of God on others who were going to cause trouble in the church. God’s discipline is a sign that He loves us. When we are afflicted, we should search our hearts to see if God is dealing with us about sin in our lives. Even if it is not because of sin, God has allowed the affliction and wants to teach us through it. It is often a time to stop and think about our walk with the Lord.

Don’t grow weary of being reproved by the Lord. He is drawing you closer to Himself. Jacob’s wrestling match with the Lord resulted in a permanent limp (Genesis 32:31). It always reminded him of the encounter. Some of the great men and women of God in church history had lifelong afflictions. We often hold health up as the most treasured thing we can have, but a deepening relationship with the Lord is infinitely more precious.

Remember: Don’t despise affliction, but instead consider it as the love of God drawing you to Himself.

## 11/23 Hebrews 12:22-24

*22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

The children of Israel were led to Mount Sinai, where the holiness of God caused the mountain to shake and be ablaze with fire. To touch the mountain would mean death. The words of God were like a trumpet and so awesome that the people begged Moses to go and hear for them. The Law was delivered to Moses on tablets of stone.

The New Covenant came to us on Mount Zion and to the people of God with countless angels in celebration as each soul comes into the covenant by the blood of Jesus. Entering into this covenant means you are joining those who inherit the Kingdom and are destined for heaven. This covenant brings us into the very presence of God, who gives us the righteousness of His Son. God will finish the work He started in us, perfecting our souls (Philippians 1:6).

This covenant brings us to Jesus who made us at peace with God. His blood sealed this covenant. If Abel’s blood still cries out about injustice, think how much more powerfully Jesus’ blood declares that we are justified because of His sacrifice.

Consider: The purpose of the Old Covenant was to lead us to Jesus. Praise Him for all that is ours when we are in Him!

## 11/24 Hebrews 13:2

*2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

Abraham was sitting in the door of his tent when three strangers appeared. He immediately asked them if they would stay under the shade of the tree and allow him to give them water and prepare a meal for them. These men were two angels and the LORD, but they had the appearance of men (Genesis 18:1-8).

I have heard numerous stories of people being rescued, warned, encouraged, or aided by a stranger who seemed to vanish. A wife of one of the elders in our church had an inexplicable encounter at a time when she needed encouragement. There is even a periodical reporting such encounters people have had. Some of these may be good Samaritans, but many may well be actual encounters with angels.

The author of Hebrews tells us these beings are sent to minister to the heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14). Our verse today tells us this is a good reason to be hospitable to strangers. That traveler you assist may be there to assist you.

Consider: The physical realm is permeated with the spiritual realm. While we don’t need to hunt for angels or demons, we do need to realize that things aren’t always what they seem. Thank God for angelic assistance, and don’t discount another’s story of supernatural aid.

## 11/25 Hebrews 13:7

*7 Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.*

The leaders referred to are the apostles and elders. By the time the letter to the Hebrews was written, some of the leaders had been executed for not denying Jesus as Lord. They had taught the churches the Word of God and had gone on to their heavenly reward. Why would the author of Hebrews ask the readers to consider the outcome of their faith?

The apostles knew they had spent their lives investing in eternity. Death meant they would go to the physical presence of Jesus, whom they so longed to be with again. Death meant they would receive their reward for a life of service. They graduated from this life that was plagued with the suffering common to all in a fallen world. They left this world victorious over it. That was what the author was asking the church to consider.

This exhortation is encouraging us to imitate the faith of those apostles and of the men and women of God who share the Word with you. If we do, we will be living for the unseen with confidence in the reality of our faith. We will be confident that the love and grace of God are the greatest treasures we can possess both now and forever. With that truth in our mind and heart, we live by priorities that the world cannot understand. We become the servants of all. We know the peace of God and look forward to our own graduation (Philippians 1:23).

Consider: Reflect on the outcome of the lives of men and women of God. Then ask yourself: Am I living for the unseen reality?

## 11/26 Hebrews 13:17

*17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

“Submission” has become a word with negative connotations. Whether it is wives submitting to their husbands, or parishioners submitting to their leaders, there have been so many bad examples that we’d rather do without the Bible’s instruction. But the problem is not with the Bible. It is with our lack of godly husbands and elders. There is a lack of godly men who will die to themselves to unselfishly serve their wives and their churches.

It is your responsibility to seek out a fellowship where the elders are chosen according to the biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7). Once you find that church led by godly men who reach their decisions through prayer, then submit to their leading. One of the greatest burdens to pastors is the divisiveness caused when someone in the congregation builds a faction to resist a decision of the elders. It is certainly helpful to voice an opinion to the elders, but then accept the decision they reach. They are seeking to glorify God and to build up the members in the Lord.

When you disagree with their decision, trust the Lord to work through the situation to teach you or them. Usually the fruit of the decision will be evident in time. Pray for your elders to clearly hear from the Lord. Resist the temptation to gather others to your opinion. If you will follow this instruction, the elders will watch over your soul with joy and not with groaning.

Consider: Leaders always face criticism because they lead. You can be an encouragement to them with words and obedience. In doing so, you are being faithful to the Lord.

11/27 James 1:2  *2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.*

This is a transformational way of looking at difficulties in our lives. Most of us see difficulty and pain as unnecessary interruptions to the way life should be. We aren’t joyful by any measure about our difficulties. James is telling us that we should change the way we see trials. We shouldn’t merely be joyful, but “count it all joy.” That is quite a reversal to the way the world and many Christians see things.

He goes on to say that it is through the trials that we learn to be steadfast. That means to patiently endure. He chose his words well because the root word for endurance in Greek, *hupomone*, can also mean cheerful. He went on to tell us that endurance results in maturity so that we lack nothing. So if we can foresee the end product of the various trials in our lives, we will count it “all joy” when we face them.

That sounds like an impossible perspective to maintain. What is your goal? If it is temporary happiness in the present, your goal is shortsighted. If it is spiritual maturity into Christlikeness so that you are equipped in every good way, then this change of thinking is practical and logical.

Consider: In the USA it is the season of Thanksgiving. The verse for today is a challenge to us all to be thankful for the result of past, present, and future trials. They are maturing us. Will you pray this prayer from your heart? “Lord, as trials come into my life, please help me change my attitude from complaint to joy.”

## 11/28 James 1:17

*17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

If there is anything truly good in your life, you can be sure it came from God. He is the source of all goodness. Evil is the result of turning away from that goodness by those who abuse free will. In the previous devotion we saw that God’s goodness sometimes takes the form of trials. Every good gift is from God because goodness and love are His nature. His nature will never change throughout all eternity. The rest of your life will be full of His good and perfect gifts, but you will only see them as such when you see them with God’s perspective.

Think about a few of the many good and perfect gifts that are ours in Jesus: the forgiveness of sins, our seat with Christ in the heavenly realms, fellowship with Him, the answer to prayers that conform to His will, heavenly rewards, gifts and talents, a family of believers, righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Spirit, and the promise of a transformed heavenly body. I could go on and on, but that is for you to contemplate. Let us not forget to add discipline and trials to any list.

The apostle Paul tells us that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). The greatest gift of all is Himself. He gives Himself to us. “To us a Son is given” (Isaiah 9:6).

Ponder: In giving us Himself, Jesus has given us every good thing (Romans 8:32).

## 11/29 James 2:12

*12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.*

Our words and our actions are the sum of our expression to others. James tells us that we should both speak and act as those who will be judged by the law of liberty, which is the freedom we have in Christ. The laws of the Old Covenant that were given to Moses for the nation of Israel are no longer the standards by which behavior is judged. The law of liberty can also be called the law of love (Matthew 22:37-40). Our words and actions are judged by whether they show love for God and man.

If you were hiding a Jew in Nazi Germany, could you have lied in good conscience to the gestapo when they asked if there was anyone else in your home? Of course you could have! It would have been an act of love for God, for the Jew, and even for the gestapo in keeping them from a greater sin. You may have suffered for it, but you would have been judged by God as having done what was righteous (Romans 13:10).

Law and liberty together sounds like an oxymoron. However, this is actually the perfect way to describe life in Jesus. We are free from the enslaving power of sin so that we can act in love at the leading of the Holy Spirit. We are free to be who God created us to be. We are obedient servants and yet we find liberty, joy, and peace as we obey.

Consider: Have you been liberated by the law of love?

## 11/30 James 2:26

*26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*

What does it mean to be a Christian? We might simply answer that it is to be a believer in Jesus. But that definition is woefully inadequate. Most of those who call themselves Christians don’t believe Jesus died for their sins. They don’t believe Jesus’ death accomplished anything. They aren’t even sure if Jesus was divine by any means.

Even if we were to expand the meaning to include faith in Jesus’ sacrifice for us, we would still find many do not meet this standard set by James. He is telling us that real faith will result in a transformed life and gives a couple of examples in this chapter to back up his statement. One was the father of the Jewish people and the other a Gentile harlot whose story is told in the Old Testament (see James 2:21-25). In both Ant

If your spirit left your body, your body would be dead. In the same way, faith that does not result in words and actions that demonstrate that faith means the person’s faith is dead. Real faith will affect what you say and do today. Is your faith a real and living faith? Communion with Jesus in prayer and regular consumption of God’s Word are essential to a living faith. Out of these essentials flow the actions that show our faith to be alive and well.

Consider: If someone were to try to convict you of being a Christian in a court of law, would a jury decide you were guilty? Would there be enough evidence to convict you? If not, get serious about the essentials of living faith. Talk to Jesus about it right now.

## 12/1 James 3:1

*1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.*

The teaching and preaching of the Word of God is a high calling that a person should not lightly take up. We can all share what the Lord has shown us in the Word, but to teach it authoritatively is another matter. It requires a life dedicated to reading, memorizing, and studying the Scriptures. To teach the Word is to explain the heart of God. Teachers must do so with the fear of the Lord.

James is warning those who would teach that God will judge them with greater strictness. If a teacher shares on a passage on forgiveness, he or she better exemplify it. If the teacher does not demonstrate what he or she teaches, the message the person conveys is muddled. God challenges teachers to live by His grace, as examples of what they are teaching. The message must be seen as well as heard. The judgment on teachers can be God’s swift dealings in circumstances so that the teachers’ lives are brought into line with their teaching.

The body of Christ today needs more men and women who devote themselves to the Word of God (Colossians 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:15). There are Bibles everywhere, and yet we have a famine for hearing the Word of the Lord. So few are willing to devote themselves to understanding the words of life.

Consider: Whether you are called to teach or not, will you devote time every day to getting to know and understand Jesus’ words that will not pass away (Matthew 24:35)?

## 12/2 James 3:15-16

*15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.*

Jealousy and selfish ambition are works of the fallen nature of humanity. James is contrasting these heart attitudes with works done through the Spirit. Faith will be manifest in good works, but others who do not have faith may become jealous of the praise given to others’ expressions of faith. They will try to imitate the expressions of faith to gain positions in the church. Many times they even fool themselves into thinking they are super-spiritual. But their actions are really unspiritual and demonic.

In most cases those who are given to jealousy and selfish ambition will seek promotion and titles. Instead of being the servant of all, they want to be the leader of all. Sometimes they will tell others God has spoken to them and give orders supposedly from God. When God speaks to hearts today, it is usually to convict or encourage the individual who is hearing God, and is not meant for others. The Spirit of God encourages each person into a personal relationship with Jesus. As these of selfish ambition grow in influence, they will end up in conflict with the elders of the local church. This is when they bring disorder to the church. They will seek to have followers who respect them more than God’s appointed elders.

James tells us that jealousy and selfish ambition are demonic. It is the opposite of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Selfish ambition tears churches apart and sometimes even divides families. Beware of this nature invading your church and your own life.

Remember: The true result of faith is love and service with no desire for recognition. The fruits of the Spirit will be evident. Faith is seen in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

## 12/3 James 4:4

*4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

Throughout the Old Testament God compared His people’s worship of idols to adultery. We are to love God with our whole heart. Any love that competes for the place of God’s love in our heart or that we credit with the ability to truly satisfy us is spiritual adultery. A married man or woman may not have a physical relationship with another person other than his or her spouse, but when he or she dreams of how another person would make a better spouse and longs to be with that person, their longings are spiritual adultery.

The word “world” in this verse represents the things that tempt us to turn from God to satisfactions apart from Him. God has made every good thing for us to enjoy in moderation and in its proper place and time. The “world” is tempting us to overindulge and use things in ways other than God intended. Spiritual adultery is to look to these things for fulfillment.

To be a friend of the world is to live for the things we think will satisfy us. What is our driving force each day? What occupies our thought life? What do we long to do? If the answer is merely temporal things of the world, we have made ourselves enemies of God. We have fallen for the lie that tells us that if we have enough of something, our heart will be full and content. The only true contentment and heart satisfaction that will last is a relationship with God through Jesus.

Consider: Are there things in your heart and mind that compete with God for your affection?

## 12/4 James 4:7-8

*7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

If there is a formula for resisting the destructive power of evil, this is it. Begin by submitting yourself to God. That means to surrender your heart to God. Let go of your desires and make a conscious choice to let Him lead you. When we realize His will is the best thing for us, we should choose to obey.

The next step is resisting the Devil. That is what Eve failed to do in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-7). When the Devil called God a liar, she should have told the Devil that he is a liar and walked away. We best resist Satan when we employ the Word of God. Jesus showed us how to do that when He was tempted in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-10). Reminding ourselves of the truth of God’s Word diminishes the temptation at hand. Sometimes resistance is simply refusing to listen to the seduction of evil.

Once we have resisted the Devil, we draw near to God. You can’t resist for long before you find you are being renewed in the Lord’s strength. When we draw near to God we are reminded of the greatness of His love and the reason that we shun temptation. Our conviction to submit to God is refreshed when we experience His presence in prayer. And finally, we repent of any sin in our life and of any desire that is outside of God’s will. Temptation is most powerful when our heart is divided between God and some temporal promise of pleasure.

Prayer: Lord, help my mind and heart to realize Your great love for me so that I might joyfully submit to You.

## 12/5 James 5:9

*9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*

James is addressing a problem in the church that has remained for two thousand years. Personalities and callings are bound to differ and often clash. People tend to see the more forceful person as the one who makes a greater case. That is why both parties in a conflict refuse to acknowledge that the other has prevailed. In reality, the spiritually mature person will humbly refuse to escalate the tension.

This is not to say that there won’t be times when one must take an inflexible stand. When it comes to sound doctrine regarding Jesus, we must not compromise, but we can take our stand graciously. When it comes to minor doctrines such as how we practice our faith and personal preferences, humility and gentleness are the fruits of the Spirit that need to be expressed. These are the fruits that maintain unity and show the love and grace God has toward us.

This also applies in the home. A husband should praise his wife for her good qualities, not grumble about her actions that he does not like. The wife should have the same grace toward her husband. The elders and the congregation should apply the same principle towards one another. Since we reap what we sow, we should all be sowing grace and patience as liberally as God enables us.

Consider: We should guard our words and attitudes as if Jesus was about to return the next second.

## 12/6 1 Peter 1:22

*22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.*

Peter is describing the life that has been transformed through Jesus’ death and resurrection. He tells us this new life should be holy in all that we do. The cost of redemption was more than silver or gold. It was the precious blood of Christ. Knowing God loves us to such a great extent and paid such a high price, we are expected to live a life of real meaning and purpose. Our deeds will one day be judged.

This is why we sincerely love one another. The life of Jesus in us is love. Our new heart has brotherly love for the family of God who has also been redeemed by the blood of Christ. But Peter is telling us to go even further and love others with God’s love. That is an intense love that is willing to sacrifice for the ones you hold dear. This kind of love can only come from a heart that is kept pure of selfishness.

This struggle to keep our hearts free of selfishness is perhaps our greatest battle after coming to Christ. We need to do what Peter commands earlier in the chapter. In verse 13 he tells us to prepare our minds for action, being self-controlled, and setting our hope fully on the grace we will receive when Jesus comes again.

Consider: Our thought life and our desires must be subject to the reality of the purchase price of our redemption. Our thoughts and desires should be in constant awareness of Jesus’ imminent return.

## 12/7 1 Peter 2:1

*1 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.*

The apostle Peter is telling us what should be the result of having been born again through the living and enduring Word of God. We should put away all malice. That is an effort that we make. We should forsake the anger and animosity we have toward anyone. We are to love one another. If in any way we deceive others, that deception should cease. Our heavenly Father cannot lie and neither should we.

We must also put away hypocrisy lest we give an excuse for others not to believe. If we are struggling with an area of our life, we should find believers we can go to for prayer. Sin’s power weakens when we bring it into the light.

Envy is the sin of the tenth commandment, which is to covet what belongs to another. While we should desire the best gifts of the Spirit, we should not envy the gifts and positions that God has given to fellow believers. God is the One who distributes the gifts as He determines best. Humbly accept what God has given you and where He has placed you.

Slander must go, too. We are sometimes tempted to use the guise of a prayer request to slander someone whom we dislike in government, the church, or our community. Love sees the good in others and God’s desire for them. If you can’t say something positive about another person, don’t say anything. Pray for God’s will to be done in and through the individual.

Consider: The love of God in us should, in time, end all malice and deceit. It should stop hypocrisy and envy. It will certainly silence any form of slander. Each problem goes back to a lack of love for God.

## 12/8 1 Peter 2:24

*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.*

If I were to ask a fellow believer why Jesus died, the response is likely to be this: “So that all who come to Him might have forgiveness and eternal life.” That is true, but it misses what Peter is getting at in our verse today. In this verse Peter and elsewhere Paul (Romans 6:16-20) emphasize the immediate change that takes place. The power of sin is broken and we are enabled to live by the Spirit.

This is also the picture that baptism portrays. Our death to sin is symbolized by immersion in water. It pictures burial. Rising from the water represents being resurrected with Jesus to new life, a righteous life. The ritual does not save you, but it does declare what has taken place in your life. Those who pray to be saved from judgment but have no change in their lives have not yet been freed from the power of sin. We are not instantly made sinless, but the purpose, direction, and desires of our lives have made an about-face.

Peter quotes Isaiah 53:5, “with his wounds we are healed,” and interprets it to mean Jesus heals us from the bondage of sin. Perhaps you have heard this verse quoted many times related to physical healing. In some instances that may be true, but here Peter is speaking of a healing of our nature.

Consider: Think about this purpose for which Jesus died for you. Have you been living it out? Do you realize that God’s love for you sent Jesus to the cross to free you from the destructive effects of sin in your life? May it not be in vain!

## 12/9 1 Peter 3:15

*15 . . . but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.*

Peter tells his readers in verse 14 that if we suffer for doing what is right, we will be blessed by God. That is why we shouldn’t fear persecution. We should always honor Christ as our Master. Christ isn’t instructing us out of selfishness, but out of His holiness. What He asks of us He asks because it is the right thing to do. With that in mind, we come to the part of the verse that is often quoted.

The defense we give for our hope can be given to those who persecute us. This is the key verse for the apologetic ministry. The word translated “defense” is the Greek word *apologia.* Apologetics is a reasoned defense of the Christian faith. One of the great apologists of our time is Ravi Zacharias. I highly recommend his books and radio program, *Let My People Think*. (See rzim.org.)

Those who oppose Christianity have been developing arguments for two thousand years. If we are to be prepared to answer serious inquiries about our faith, we need to be equipped by studying God’s Word and by listening to those like Ravi who have more experience answering the serious questions.

Consider: The last words of our verse tell us to give our reasons with gentleness and respect. The gospel challenges people’s assumptions about life and their priorities. It is no wonder those who challenge us can become irate. However, we must always respond in the Spirit of Christ if we are to be heard, gently persuading them and respecting them as another being made in the image of God, for whom Christ died. We don’t debate to win the argument but to persuade souls of God’s great love for them.

## 12/10 1 Peter 4:12-13

*12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.*

Trials are a part of human life; however, Christians have trials for a purpose. Selfishness makes a person miserable. Greed will separate you from friends. Lust results in loneliness. Sometimes godly people will find their trials come from others responses to their example of following Jesus. A godly life convicts those who observe it. To stifle their conviction, they will mock you or try to find fault with you. Other trials come as a part of our deep concern for others. There are also trials simply from living in a fallen world, trials such as sickness and the death of loved ones. This is what we should expect living in a sin sick world.

God will use the trials of the godly to refine and mature them. They are like the things Christ endured when He lived among us. He wept like we do. He experienced the same hunger and tiredness as our own. He was falsely accused and physically suffered to a greater extent than most of us will ever experience. Those who suffer for righteousness’ sake can look forward to the revealing of Christ’s glory, for we will share in it (Romans 8:17).

Prayer: Lord Jesus, please help me to see past my suffering to the wonder of sharing Your glory. Thank you for the honor of suffering for Your name’s sake.

## 12/11 1 Peter 5:5-6

*5 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,*

The qualifications for elder (overseer) never specify anything about physical age (1 Timothy 3:1-7). They do point out that the person should not be a recent convert. Therefore, in this passage, I would interpret “younger” to mean spiritually new to the faith. The spiritual babes in Christ should submit to the leaders of the church. The leaders have been through what the newer believers are experiencing and can help guide them in the life of faith.

The young believers should humbly submit to the instruction of the elders, but Peter goes on to say all believers should express humility toward one another. If we could all practice this advice, there would be no squabbles in the church. Most of our divisions come from not understanding the heart of the person with whom we are arguing. Both sides want to be right and can’t see the middle ground or step back and consider the other person’s perspective.

Peter gives us a great reason to express humility. God opposes the proud! If you want God to oppose you, insist on having your way. Wouldn’t it be better to humble yourself and have the promise of grace bestowed on your life? God promised to exalt the humble in the proper time.

Consider: The humble can wait for God to exalt them when He so wills, but the proud feel they must be exalted now because they think they know best.

## 12/12 2 Peter 1:1-2

*1 Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: 2 May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*

Peter’s introduction to his first letter only described himself as an apostle. He certainly had learned humility through his betrayal of Jesus, but that humility deepened over the years (Matthew 26:75). In this second letter he describes himself as a servant of Jesus before telling us he is an apostle. Christian maturity is expressed as a clearer demonstration of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24).

Peter described the recipients of the letter as those who had obtained a faith of equal standing with that of the apostles. He goes on to explain that this is because our faith is by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. It is not our own righteousness that justifies us before God, but the righteousness of Jesus freely given to us who have received Him as our Savior. Because it is His righteousness, we are all on equal standing before God. You and I are as righteous as the apostles in God’s eyes, for the Father sees Jesus’ righteousness when He looks upon us (Romans 3:22).

The request for grace and peace in the life of another is a wonderful greeting. Many in our congregation have taken to closing their letters or emails with this expression. Could we ask for anything greater for those we address than that grace and peace to be multiplied as they grow in the knowledge of Jesus? Also take notice of how Peter describes Jesus as God in verse one, but then makes the distinction of “God” and “Jesus our Lord” in verse two.

Consider: Why not take this wonderful greeting of verse two as an expression in your oral and written communication? May grace and peace be multiplied to you!

## 12/13 2 Peter 2:18-19

*18 For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. 19 They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.*

This chapter written by Peter is about the false teachers who attempt to exploit the church. Peter tells us that they are motivated by two things, sensuality and financial gain. They take advantage of the fact that Christians are gentle and patient. Their target is the spiritually immature or weak believers. These false teachers bring in their heresies secretly so as not to alert the elders. Their teaching awakens the passions that the weak believers had recently forsaken. The end result is destruction for false teachers and their followers, and the way of truth is blasphemed.

These false teachers are so arrogant that they boast of a special relationship with God. They slander heavenly beings, which even the angels dare not do. This bold pride they exhibit is attractive to the weaker believers who are undiscerning. They preach freedom while leading their followers back into the bondage of sensuality.

The judgment upon these false teachers will be severe and deservedly so. Watch yourself and immature believers that are attracted to anyone who teaches without the approval of the elders in your fellowship. Let your elders know what is happening. Secrecy is a sure sign that something is amiss.

Remember: Any teaching that entices you back into sins you have forsaken is spiritually dangerous. Don’t be deceived.

## 12/14 2 Peter 3:11

*11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness . . .*

Peter tells us that on the day of God the heavens will be dissolved and everything on earth exposed (Isaiah 34:4). Every physical thing men devote themselves to will be gone. Some people amass fortunes only to die and leave them to others who did not labor for them. Heirs fight among themselves over things that will vanish away. Who is living for eternity? Who realizes what is really of value?

People of genuine faith in God’s Word do as Jesus commanded, laying up treasure in heaven instead of on the earth (Matthew 6:19-20). Why would you invest in a stock or business you know would one day fail? Why wouldn’t you invest in one that you knew was going to never fail and the dividends of which were certain to be out of this world!

The question then is this: how do we invest in such a sure thing? Peter tells us the answer. Once you have received the salvation Jesus offers, live a life of holiness and godliness. Live in communion with God and His Word, seeking always to do His will. Set your heart on things above, and not on earthly things (Colossians 3:1). Keep the reality of eternity always before you while at the same time knowing all the things men spend their lives on will soon be gone.

Consider: Satan tempts us with the temporal things of this life because that is all he has to offer. He promises that things will satisfy but neglects to tell us that they won’t last long and the price we will end up paying.

## 12/15 1 John 1:3

*3 That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

John was telling the recipients of the letter that the apostles did not invent the story of Jesus. They actually heard His voice and touched His physical body. Jesus took on a human body in the womb of Mary, as human as you and I but without our sin nature (1 John 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21). John was sharing the words of the One who came down from heaven so that his readers would be able to fellowship with other believers. By receiving the Word of God, we are born again (1 Peter 1:23). We can commune with the Father and the Son.

In this new life from God, we are able to share with one another what the Spirit of God reveals to our spirit through His Word. That is what John is calling fellowship. It is mutual participation in life in the Spirit. As we commune with God in the Word and prayer, we have insights to share with one another. As we share this new life we experience great joy in the Lord.

Why is it then that when we get together with other believers we often revert to meaningless talk about the weather and affairs of the world? Perhaps we may not have spent the time with the Lord to receive fresh manna—insights and lessons—from heaven. We may fear our convictions differ from one another. Or maybe we don’t want to be seen as the super-spiritual one. Whatever our excuse may be, we are missing too much to hang on to it. Take time with the Lord and share your insights with others to edify them.

Remember: Walk in the Spirit and you will have fellowship with the Father and the Son, as well as with your fellow believers.

## 12/16 1 John 2:10

*10 Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.*

Jesus told his disciples to abide in Him (John 15:4). Jesus is the light of the world. To remain in Him is to remain in the light. The world’s understanding of things is darkness. It is disconnected from eternal realities and cannot see what is of true worth. In Christ there is light to see things as they truly are. In His light we can discern what is worthless and what is of value (Psalm 36:9). That is why He wants us to continually remain in Him.

The Scriptures give us signs of authentic Christianity. One of the chief signs of those who abide in the light is love for the family of God. A natural expression of that love is concern for the eternal destiny of others. While it is not our duty to determine who is in the light and who is not, there are times when we need to discern the difference. It is a helpful guideline in our own life to check ourselves. Our own hearts can deceive us, but this truth can set us straight.

Genuine love will make every effort to not stumble others. We watch our own speech and actions to be careful not to turn others away from the Lord. We readily give up our freedoms and become all things to all people in order to draw them to Christ (1 Corinthians 9:22). This is the love of God manifested in our lives toward the eternal souls of others.

Consider: Our interaction with others will have eternal consequences for good or evil. May the grace of God help us to always gently point others to the light of Christ.

## 12/17 1 John 3:23

*23 And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.*

Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). He added a second command, to love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31). John is restating these commandments in his own words. To believe in Jesus is to receive Him as your Lord and Savior, and this results in an increasing love for Him. That is because the more we experience His love, the more we love Him in return.

John went on to write that anyone who keeps these commandments remains in God and God remains in him or her. But there is a second assurance. It is the Spirit Whom He has given to us. We experience His leading and desires that are one with God’s. The Spirit keeps pointing us to Jesus and showing us expressions of His love. The Spirit’s love for others causes us to love them, too. In other words, the Spirit helps us to keep the commands of God.

The result of all this is living in a way that is pleasing to God and cooperating with God by praying His will into the earth. Answered prayer increases our faith. This process causes us to grow in the faith and deepen our relationship with Jesus.

Consider: Is this the process you see working in your life? If not, it’s time to get back on track and commit yourself afresh to Jesus.

## 12/18 1 John 4:1

*1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world*.

God gifted most people with a desire to be led. We tend to follow individuals with whom we mostly agree and for whom we have a great deal of respect. Most people would rather follow than to lead. This can be a blessing as we are to follow godly people who closely follow Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:1). However, it can be detrimental when an attractive personality, out of prideful desire to be important, presents himself or herself as a leader. We need discernment to know the difference.

Discernment comes from knowing God’s Word. Godly leaders will never contradict God’s Word. They may interpret a passage differently from others, but their interpretation should not contradict the context or other Scripture. Godly leaders will invite others to be their equals to hold them accountable. Prideful false teachers elevate themselves above everyone else. They won’t listen to a counter opinion. They see themselves as the final authorities. False teachers rarely if ever admit they could be wrong. Godly leaders readily acknowledge their faults and limitations.

Another warning sign of false prophets is their tendency to either be judgmental or to encourage pride in others. When these false teachers receive the response they desire, they tend to praise the person giving it. When they don’t get the response they are seeking, they will harshly judge the person in front of others to get him or her to conform. This is not the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24).

Remember: Beware of false prophets. The Word of God and the fruits of the Spirit will help you discern who is or is not of God.

## 12/19 1 John 4:8

*8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

Greek is much more precise in expressing nuances of words than other languages. There are four Greek words for “love.” The word used here is *agape.* It is love that expects nothing in return. It loves because of the value of the object that is loved. When John declares that God is *agape* love, he is being very precise. He is not speaking of romantic love, brotherly love, or mere desire for things. It is a much greater concept.

Each person is made in the image of God. Mankind is the one thing in this world that is eternal in the sense that we have eternal worth and that God made us to walk in eternity with Him. That is why we are to love God and our neighbor. The image we bear and the value God places on us means each person is of immeasurable worth. When we come to know God, we begin to see that worth in God and those who bear His image. Like God, we love what is of real value.

John uses this truth to indicate who is or is not of God. If we know God we have *agape* for God and others. If we don’t know God then we don’t have a reason or an ability to express the unselfish love of God. The more we come to know God the more we express *agape* toward God and others. As more and more of God’s *agape* love is revealed to us, it is increasingly expressed in us.

Consider: Is *agape* evident in your life? Are you willing to see the value and potential of those who offend you?

## 12/20 1 John 5:4

*4 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*

John described the world as consisting of the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). In our verse for today he is telling us that those who have been born again have overcome the world. That does not mean that these temptations do not affect us, but rather that they do not dominate us (1 John 1:8-9; 2:1). We have the power from God to resist the world’s control. We are victorious over the power of what John calls “the world.”

Our faith in Jesus and His work for us on the cross is the source of our victory. When we know we are forgiven, we don’t accept condemnation (Romans 8:1). Instead, we look to the power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us and help us resist temptation in our own areas of weakness. We find someone to hold us accountable. Our increasing knowledge of God causes us to love Him more and weakens the power of temptation. When we allow Him to fill our hearts, the power of temptation is weakened and our faith in Him is strengthened.

John saw that the world was not just a setting in which we live out our lives, but a battleground for the souls of men. The world, under the power of Satan, entices us to destruction, while God is constantly working in the hearts and minds of each one of us to draw us to His love. The only way to overcome is to surrender to the love of God and grow in faith.

Consider: Do you see the war raging in your own life and that of those around you? Has your faith made you an overcomer?

## 12/21 1 John 5:19

*19 We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*

John explained that we know we are of God because we love God and the family of God (1 John 5:2). We are no longer dominated by sin (1 John 5:18). The Enemy of our soul can’t do as he pleases with us, for God protects His children (1 John 3:1). But those who have not come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and have rejected the forgiveness He offers us don’t realize these benefits. They are under the power of the Evil One.

To treat others as if they have no value is normal for those who don’t love God. They live entirely for themselves. Without realizing it, they are dominated by Evil One. It is quite normal then that they can extinguish a life in the womb and justify it. If they cheat you or abuse your trust, don’t be surprised. Their disobedience to laws and lack of concern for others is to be expected.

When we realize the power of the Evil One over their lives and realize that we were once in the same condition (Ephesians 2:1-2), we should have compassion instead of anger. We should desire to see them have the same freedom we have found in Jesus. The actions of the world may upset us deeply, but we should long to see everyone set free, even when their actions have hurt us. Jesus exemplified this from the cross when He said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34a).

Consider: This is another challenge to think upon and respond to in a way that is different from the way the world would respond. The change doesn’t happen overnight, but is brought about by meditating on and acting on the truth of the Word.

## 12/22 2 John 1:8

*8 Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.*

As an individual and as a congregation, we should pay attention to our spiritual condition. If we aren’t going forward, we are going backward. We don’t work for our salvation, but we do work for heavenly rewards. We do as Jesus commanded and lay up treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:20). John is telling us that we can fall short of the full reward God intended for us.

John and others had invested into the believers’ lives so that they might be fruitful and advance God’s kingdom. God has preplanned the good works for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). He equips us, sets the stage, and creates the conditions. All we have to do is be obedient, and He does the rest. For just being obedient, we are promised heavenly rewards (Matthew 10:41-42). God is pleased to reward us for bringing glory to His name.

We can choose to not accept God’s invitation to serve. Making such a choice does not mean our soul is not saved, but it does mean we will fall short of a full reward. It’s as if you had an opportunity to swap a piece of fruit that would soon decay for a gold bar that would only increase in value. You can eat it now or have something much more valuable forever. Jesus promised a hundred times as much in return—that’s a 10,000 percent increase (Mark 10:30). Don’t become so caught up in the temporal pleasures of this life that you miss the opportunity to trade the perishable for the eternal.

Remember: Watch yourselves, so that you don’t fall short of a full reward.

## 12/23 3 John 1:9

*9 I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority.*

The upside-down world of the kingdom of God is never about being first (Mark 9:35). The person who is critical of all other Christians and Christian movements is enslaved to pride. In the following two verses, John wrote that Diotrephes not only refused to acknowledge the authority of the apostles, he spoke wicked nonsense against them. He also refused to welcome others who proclaimed the gospel and put those who wanted to welcome the apostles out of the church.

Diotrephes was busy creating the cult of Diotrephes. In his swollen pride, he believed the only one that really had it right was himself. We wonder why anyone would continue to be a part of his congregation. By observing modern cults, we can see that their leaders are quite convincing. They cause the followers to believe they are part of an elite movement of God that is particularly favored. The pride of the leader infects the flock.

While we differ on interpretation of nonessential issues, believers in Jesus agree on His virgin birth, sinless life, atoning death, resurrection, and Second Coming. We should welcome fellowship with any who believe these core beliefs, while agreeing to disagree on peripheral issues and to respectfully discuss our differences. Diotrephes’s style based on pride is seen in numerous groups. You can spot them by their incessant accusation of others. They rarely speak of what they are for without attacking other believers.

Consider: The humble believer listens to others and examines the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). Knowing how limited we are, we should always consider the possibility that we are in error on minor issues.

## 12/24 Jude 1:20-21

*20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*

Jude’s short letter was a call to believers to contend for the faith that the apostles shared with them. False teachers crept into the church and distorted the message. Their motivation was sensuality and personal gain. God has a reservation for them in the place of eternal torment. The Day of Judgment will come.

To counter this destructive element that was distorting the message of Jesus, Jude told the believers to build themselves up in their most holy faith. We are built up through the Word of God that increases our faith. Don’t slack off in the study of the Word and applying it to your life. Encourage one another with testimonies of what the Lord has done and is doing in your life. Pray in the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us this is a way to edify ourselves (1 Corinthians 14:4, 15). Our old nature is always ready to step back into a leading role and take back control of our lives. Feed your spirit more faithfully than you do your body.

We are coming to the end of this devotional. What is your plan to continue meditating on the Word? Perhaps you might listen to a sermon online each morning (bible-sermons.org). Or you may want to start a study in the Bible on a particular topic. I can recommend the study *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby. *Preaching the Word* commentaries are an excellent source of sermons. We are blessed with so many resources in our time. We need to use them to build ourselves up in the faith.

Remember: Keep growing in Christ so that you can discern what is of God and what is contrary to the Scriptures. Contend for the faith!

## 12/25 Revelation 1:5

*5. . . and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood . . .*

Christmas Day is often focused on material things. I hope that in your home you take the time to focus it on Jesus coming into the world to show us the love of God and free us from our sins by His blood. The Christmas presents we open today will most likely be in the garbage dump ten years from now. But what Jesus has done and all He means to us will only grow throughout eternity.

We begin the devotions in Revelation with a reminder that Jesus is the faithful witness of God’s nature. He spoke only what He heard from the Father. He did only what He saw the Father doing. He perfectly represented God in everything He did and said. If we want to know God, we must look at the life of Jesus.

While Jesus was born in Bethlehem at a specific time in history, He was also later to become the firstborn from the dead. That means He was the first to be resurrected into His eternal body. The day will come when all who believe in Him will experience the same physical resurrection. In the meantime, our spirits will be with Him awaiting that glorious day.

Consider: Because we know that this world and everything in it will pass away, shouldn’t our focus this Christmas and every day be on our Savior?

## 12/26 Revelation 3:20

*20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*

This is a favorite verse of many people. It is referred to when people are invited to receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord. However, the context is quite different. Jesus was addressing a church that had fallen away from eternal things to focus on that which is passing. In doing this, the believers’ communion with Jesus had been neglected. They thought their spiritual condition was just fine, when it really had become dry and lifeless.

Jesus used the analogy of water being hot or cold. Cold is refreshing and hot can be warming, but lukewarm is neither. The city where this church was located received its water from a hot spring. By the time it coursed its way to the city it was lukewarm. The church could easily relate to this analogy. Jesus was inviting them to renew their relationship with Him, to be stirred up again with the wonder of their salvation.

Perhaps it has been a long time since you took time to let the Lord really speak to your heart. When we allow ourselves to hear His voice, we can’t remain lukewarm. Dining in the Middle East was a time of fellowship and sharing one’s life with others. It takes time and intentionality to invite Jesus to dine with us.

Consider: We need this regular time of fellowship with the Lord so that we don’t become lukewarm. Won’t you take time right now to open that door and spend unhurried time with Jesus?

## 12/27 Revelation 4:11

*11 “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”*

We really only have three possibilities for the existence of the universe. It is eternal, it came from nothing, or eternal God created it. If matter was from eternity past, science cannot explain why there is energy in the universe. Energy dissipates over time, so an eternal universe would run out of energy. Science has for a long time been convinced that something cannot come from nothing. That leaves us with eternal God. It still takes faith to believe in each idea because no one has been in eternity past as a witness.

If God created all things, then all power comes from Him. He deserves the glory and honor for the wonder and magnitude of creation. When man describes the intricacies and beauty of creation as a cosmic accident, he not only insults our intelligence, but he insults God, too.

The reason a person so desperately searches for another reason for life is because he or she knows that acknowledging a Creator means we are all accountable to that Creator. A Creator means there are absolutes, right and wrong, and good and evil. To defy one’s own good Creator is evil. The existence of the Creator means we will one day give an account to Him for the life He so graciously gave us.

Consider: Are you giving the Creator the glory and honor He deserves for the world you see around you, everything you have, and even your very life?

## 12/28 Revelation 5:9-10

*9 And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”*

John had been taken up into heaven to witness the victorious Lion of the tribe of Judah take the sealed scroll. Jesus was the only one worthy to open it. When John looked again, the Lion was the Lamb looking as if it had been slain. The opening of the seals on the scroll usher in the end of man’s kingdoms followed by the reign of Christ. All of human inhumanity and injustice will be stopped. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the seas (Isaiah 11:9).

Jesus was and is worthy because He willingly shed His blood to ransom people for God from every tribe, language, ethnicity, and country. The city of God, New Jerusalem, will certainly be a place of unity in diversity. But these people whom the Lamb has redeemed will not remain in the city playing harps. They will be out among humankind as priestly rulers of the earth. Finally the world will have godly leaders who have no selfish motivations. As priests, their every decision will be to show the justice and righteousness of God, while also demonstrating His grace and love toward all.

Consider: When Jesus reigns, His body, which is the church, will help the world to know how good Jesus is. We won’t be sitting around twiddling our thumbs. But first, Jesus must finish what He started in you and me. How is that coming along in your life?

## 12/29 Revelation 5:11-12

*11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”*

When Jesus took the scroll from the Father, the four living creatures and the twenty four elders around the throne fell down before Him and sang a new song. The words of that song are the text in the previous devotion. Isaiah the prophet saw these creatures and told us their voices shook the foundations of the thresholds of the heavenly temple (Isaiah 6:4).

The song prompts tens of thousands of angels to join them in declaring in a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” Those angels have a much clearer picture of what was accomplished by the death and resurrection of Jesus. They can see how gracious He is to redeem wretches like us. They see His power to bring beauty from ashes. They see that power in His holy hands only brings about the perfect balance of grace and justice. That is why they declare He is forever the worthy One.

The list of things He is worthy to receive sounds as if they are trying to express that every good thing should be His. And that will come to pass, for His is the name above every name. His is the name to which every knee, including yours and mine should rightly bow (Philippians 2:9-11).

Consider: Contemplate the worthiness of Jesus to eternally reign over all, including your life.

## 12/30 Revelation 5:13-14

*13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” 14 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

As the universe reverberates with the praise of the four creatures, the twenty-four elders, and thousands of thousands of angels, all creation is stirred to join them. Perhaps for the first time since the fall of man, heaven and earth resound with one voice declaring, “To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” Finally, all creation is able to see the truth and acknowledge it on bended knee.

Man has tried for millennia past to show that he is worthy to rule himself, but has failed every time. In his effort to reign over himself and be his own lord, he has shown his belief that God is unworthy. But when the new song is sung (see devotion of 12/28) the truth will be plain for all creation to see. We will have to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord. The disobedience that began in the Garden of Eden and all disobedience that followed will be seen for what it really is, rebellion against the goodness of God.

The declaration of all creation will have reached a crescendo of praise to the Father and the Son. Blessing, honor, glory, and might to the Father and Son forever! The four living creatures with their thunderous voices affirm the reawakened creation’s declaration with, “AMEN!”

Consider: As this will be our entrance into eternity, how should we be living today? Shouldn’t we be declaring this truth with our actions and words right now?

## 12/31 Jude 1:24-25

*24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

This devotional concludes with a benediction from the previous letter of Jude. It is my prayer for you. If this devotional has benefited your relationship with Jesus, pass it on to others or encourage them to read it online. Decide what you will do each day to keep your mind renewed by the Word of God.

We can’t keep ourselves. Only the Great Shepherd can keep us, and He will. If you look to Him He will keep you from stumbling and present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy. On that day, you will not cower in His awesome presence, for you will see clearly that your sins are completely covered by His sacrifice for you. You will see nothing but total acceptance and love in Jesus’ eyes. That will certainly be great joy. His work in you will be complete, and you will never again struggle with sin.

Jude ends his letter with words of praise that sound like the heavenly declaration in a previous devotion from Revelation (see 12/29). He is declaring the fact that honor, glory, majesty, dominion, and authority belong to God the Father and the Son throughout eternity. Notice the way Jude speaks of eternity: “before all time, and now, and forever.” To resist this obvious reality is futile. To accept and embrace it is life!

Conclusion: In light of this truth, we would be foolish to focus our life on anything other than the Lord and His Word. God bless you, dear reader, as you walk with Him. I look forward to seeing you when we joyfully stand together in His glorious presence.

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