Through the Bible Daily Devotional

Morning and Evening Devotions from Genesis through Revelation

by

Pastor Paul Wallace

*Through the BibleDaily Devotional*

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Paul D. Wallace

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Dedicated to my mother, who prayed me out of darkness and into the light, and my wife, whose infinite patience with me made this book possible. Special thanks to Penny Rice for help editing, but most of all to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for all that He is.

Prelude

This is not your typical daily devotional book. It uses only a few current day stories. It is not meant to entertain you. It is for the soul that hungers for a deeper walk with Christ through a collection of thoughts from morning and evening devotions on the key passages of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. It is meant to give an overview of all of Scripture while focusing on verses that shape the way we think about God and our relationship to Him. That is the essence of the Holy Bible.

You can read one in the morning and one in the evening to go through it in one year, or if you prefer to stay in order of the books of the Bible, read the morning devotionals the first year and the evening the second year.

They are meant to challenge you to walk closer to your Lord. Each devotion ends with a thought to consider or meditate upon or a prayer based on the ideas in the passage. They only take a few minutes to read, but the challenge at the end of each devotional is meant to go with you through the day, or be your last thought at the end of your day. If you will take the time to dwell upon the ideas presented from God’s Word, it will renew your mind.

My biggest challenge in compiling this book was editing out the many powerful passages that did not fit in the 732 devotions that make up one year. In a lifetime of reading the Scriptures, these passages become like friends that speak to you, and show up to direct and help you. I had to leave many of my “friends” out of this book, but you can find the ones I left out in your Bible. Please don’t make this book a substitute for reading the Book.

My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will make the Word come alive and speak to your heart, challenging you every day to yield more of your heart unconditionally to Him.

**January 1 Morning**

Genesis 1:1 *1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

*In the beginning God*… The Bible doesn’t argue the existence of God. It does declare that it is the fool who says there is no God. (Psalm 14:1) The very first verse of the Bible begins with His action related to man, the creation of space and matter. That is the logical starting point of creation for an unchanging, eternal God.

The Bible is a declaration of who God is and His relationship to His creation, man. This first verse tells us that God is before all things and the source of all things. The fact that He alone is responsible for all things should cause us to see that we owe our existence to Him. He is the ultimate standard for what is right and appropriate, for He is the source of all. Have you bowed your head to the One who gave you life and acknowledged that you owe your all to Him? Are you living in the recognition of the fact that “*In the beginning God*…”? What should that mean to you today and every day?

Take a moment to think of the One who inhabits eternity before space was spoken into existence. He brought it into being to create a place for you. He didn’t need to. He wanted to. Do you want to know Him?

Admonition: See the world around you today as a gift from the loving hands of your Creator.

**January 1 Evening**

Daniel 9:24-26 *24 "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. 25 "Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. 26 After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.*

Daniel was pleading in prayer for the repentance and restoration of the Jewish people. The angel Gabriel came to him to deliver a timetable in which this would all come about, seventy weeks, or 70 periods of seven years.

In verse 25, the angel tells of the beginning of the countdown and divides up those years into a group of 7 sevens and 62 sevens with one remaining. The countdown begins with a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. The end of this period is the coming of the Anointed One. The Persian Empire actually issued several return and rebuild edicts, but if we follow the approximate times given, the first set of 7 sevens does take us to the rebuilt streets and trench. The next period brings us to the birth of Jesus, the Anointed One.

Verse 26 then warns that after that time, the Messiah (Anointed One) will be cut off. The Roman ruler that came did destroy the restored city and the rebuilt sanctuary. There is still one more week to come, another period of seven years.

Jesus death on the cross put an end to sin for all that will receive Him. They have found everlasting righteousness in Christ. The Anointed One is glorified, but He is not yet anointed King over all the earth. We still await that last period of seven years and Jesus taking over the kingdoms of this world.

Consider: Are you ready?

**January 2 Morning**

Genesis 1:2 *2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

God takes things from disorder to order. He does so in our lives too, if we will let Him. As God began working with the formless matter that He had created to bring about order, the Spirit hovered or brooded over the waters. In Revelation we see that waters can represent people. If we think of this passage in a figurative sense, we see the Spirit of God like a mother hen brooding over the people of the world, trying to keep them from the predator. It is under the cover of darkness that predators attack, so the Spirit covers and protects us.

Then God sends His Light into the world. *And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light*. Genesis 1:3 John the Beloved told us in the first chapter of his gospel that Jesus was the Light that lights every man that comes into the world. He shined in the darkness but the darkness did not understand. Do you understand that the Light has shown upon you? What will you do with that Light?

The Holy Spirit has hovered over you, too.

John went on to say that His own did not receive Him, but as many as did receive Him He gave the power to be sons of God. Receive Him and all that He should be to you today! Let Him bring order to the formlessness and emptiness of your life.

Meditation: How can I respond to the light of God in my life today?

**January 2 Evening**

Daniel 12:1-3 *1 "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered. 2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.*

Daniel had an incredible vision of an angel in Daniel 10. This being is so awesome that Daniel had to receive strength to be able to function in his presence.

The angel said it took 21 days to get to him because of the prince of Persia. That evil force must be the demonic power that reigned over Persia. It seems that power is always trying to destroy the Jews, and he probably still is.

He gives Daniel a long list of future events, including details about the Antichrist. In this last chapter of Daniel, the angel speaks of another angel, Michael, rising up to protect his people. Daniel’s people are the Jews. He warns of events that are more horrible than any the world has ever witnessed, and yet the Jews are miraculously delivered. The dead will be raised. Some will rise to everlasting life, and others to be forever ashamed. The wise will shine like the heavens. A common literary devise in Hebrew is to repeat an expression using different terms. The wise are those who lead many to righteousness. Shining like the heavens is to shine like the stars.

How will you awake when that day comes? Many of Daniel’s prophecies have come to pass with amazing detail. This one will also. You will rise from the dead in a transformed body to spend eternity in shining brilliance or in eternal shame. Your life affects your eternal destiny.

Consider: What are you doing about it?

**January 3 Morning**

Genesis 1:3-4 *3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.*

In the beginning God… and the Spirit of God… and God said (the Word of God). Right in the first three verses we have God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son. God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. We can understand the eternal Godhead by what we see in creation. Wherever the light goes, the darkness flees. God has always had an illustration of those which are His, separated from the darkness. Ephesians 5:8 *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.* The Scriptures call us children of the light, of the day and not of the night. Those who love truth come to the light. They come so that the darkness in them will flee and every space will be filled with light. Is every area of your life open to the Light? Do you readily come to the Light to be sure that there is no darkness in you? Allow the Lord access to every area of your life so that you may be full of light.

We are in the world but not of the world. If we are filled with light, we should be causing the darkness around us to flee, not being overcome by the darkness. *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.* (Romans 12:21 KJV)

Meditation: Is every area of my heart open to the Light?

**January 3 Evening**

Hosea 10:4, 12-13 *4 They make many promises, take false oaths and make agreements; therefore lawsuits spring up like poisonous weeds in a plowed field. 12 Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers righteousness on you. 13 But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors…*

Israel’s sins are the sins of mankind. It doesn’t matter which culture you are a part of, or what type of government you have, the experience of Israel is applicable to your situation. The nation had a revelation of God, but they refused to walk in the light of that revelation. Man tries to swindle man for personal gain or pleasure, and so, the legal systems of man are overwhelmed. There is the misuse of the legal systems to gain what is not ours. What a great description of lawsuits, “*poisonous weeds in a plowed field*”!

We should be deeply plowing the hard soil of our hearts so that they will be receptive soil for the seeds of righteousness. Then we would reap the wonderful fruit of unfailing love. If we would only seek the LORD until he comes and showers righteousness on us! That sounds like “praying through” to me. It is setting everything else aside and refusing to go on until God comes with His healing touch on your soul. “Showers of righteousness” sound so refreshing!

But instead, Hosea saw the planting of wickedness and the reaping of evil. The fruit of their efforts was not unfailing love, but deception. They had deceived themselves into thinking their strength and their warriors could save them. The path without God can only end in destruction.

Consider: What are you sowing? What are you depending on today? Seek the Lord until He comes and showers righteousness upon you. You will reap unfailing love!

**January 4 Morning**

Genesis 1:31 *31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day.*

God made everything very good because He is good. The psalmist tells us, *You are good, and what you do is good;* Psalms 119:68a (NIV). Man was placed in a perfect environment with all that he could possibly need. Evil did come into the world and ruin this ideal setting. When we deliberately block the light, there is darkness. The darkness is not a thing in itself, but the absence of light. In our world man is all too ready to blame God for the darkness, for evil. But we see that, from the beginning, all God made was very good. If we recognize that good is from God and the evil (darkness in the world) is the result of turning from Him, we would not be so quick to blame on God. How it would change our attitude toward our daily circumstances if we believed God’s intentions and plans for us are good!

If we truly believe that, we would strive to be in the Light and walk in His plans for us. How is it that we are so easily led to think that we have a better idea or plan for our lives than God’s? Are you avoiding some good thing God has for you? It is not always easy, but it is good, very good. Enjoy the good things of creation in moderation, and live in all the good that He has planned for you. *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*. Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

Prayer: Help me to see Your goodness in everything You bring into my life.

**January 4 Evening**

Joel 2:12-14 *12 'Even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.'13 Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. 14 Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing-- grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God.*

Joel (Jehovah is God) most likely prophesied early in the reign of king Josiah. He had predicted a massive attack of locusts. For an economy entirely dependent upon agriculture and pasture for their flocks, this would have been devastating. But as always, the Lord is bringing calamity so that the people will turn back to Him. He pleads with us to turn so that He does not have to use devastating events to bring us to our senses.

God pleaded with them to make a wholehearted return. He even described what it would look like, fasting and weeping and mourning. He pleaded with them to rend their heart, not their clothes. God is not looking for some outward action, but a deep inward work. Rending your heart is the result of yielding to conviction. To often, we turn from conviction and do not allow the Spirit to finish His work. We break away before our heart has been torn. He is abounding in love, and desires to turn from the calamity He has planned, if we would just turn back to Him.

When God relents, He not only diverts the calamity, but He may also leave a blessing. His gracious, compassionate heart longs to bless us. Why would we grow hard against such a loving God? He is so consistently good to us that we grow spoiled and expect His generosity. We are like the bride who is given everything her heart could desire by her loving husband, and then turns and flirts with a stranger.

Prayer: Lord God help us to rend our hearts, so that You can divert the calamity we would otherwise need.

**January 5 Morning**

Genesis 2:18 *18The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

Man was not meant to be a hermit. A solitary condition is not good. God designed Eve as a helper suitable for Adam. That is God's plan and God's intention for women. I can hear the howls of derision from those with secular minds. The helper will be a team member not a slave. What they accomplish together is their accomplishment and not his alone. He must share the glory with his helper. In the upside down world of the Kingdom, the servant is the greatest. They need each other and are incomplete without each other.

The spiritual picture here is of Christ and the church. We were made new creatures from the blood that flowed from His side, just as Eve was made from the blood flowing from Adam’s side. We are to be His helper. That is why He calls us co-laborers. It is not as though He could not do it by Himself, but that He wants to include us in what He is doing. He wants to share His work with us for our benefit. It is not good for us to be alone. We need to be at His side, laboring with Him for His glory.

Genesis 2:24 *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh*. We are to be joined to Him so that all other attachments are a distant second. Does that describe your relationship with the groom, Christ Jesus? By His Spirit, are you a suitable helper for Him?

Prayer: Help me to be the helper You intend me to be as I yield to Your life in me.

**January 5 Evening**

Amos 5:21-24 *21 "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. 22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. 23 Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. 24 But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!*

Amos was a shepherd that was called by God to prophesy to the nations. His ministry came during the height of Israel’s prosperity under Jeroboam II. The prosperity of the people had caused them to forget God who had made them prosperous and given them the land.

In the passage today, we see that they went through the rituals in the Law. They even worshipped in song as David had instructed them; yet, they were oppressing the poor and perverting justice to maintain their lifestyle. Their religious ritual meant nothing if it did not affect their life. In fact, God said that He hated and couldn’t stand it! Those are pretty harsh words. Can you imagine a preacher today saying these things to a congregation? There are surely many places in which it needs to be said.

If our religious routine does not affect our life, God detests that show of religion. It gives a detrimental witness to those who observe us. It misrepresents God. Let us all be careful to see that what we hear from God’s word and what we sing in our services are a real part of our daily lives. Let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream!

Prayer: Lord, forgive us where we have been hypocritical. Help us to worship with sincere hearts. Help us walk our talk.

**January 6 Morning**

Genesis 3:1 *1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"*

That ol’ serpent the Devil is the craftiest of all the creatures God has made. But the Scriptures tell us we are not ignorant of his devices. We see several of them right here in his first attack on mankind. First, he went to the woman. The authority over the woman was to be the man. She was made to assist the man. The enemy of our souls never goes to the proper authority. He challenges legitimate authority.

See him challenging what God has said. “*Did God really say*…?” as if you misunderstood God. In most cases, our first impression of what God said is absolutely correct. When we get down to examining the words to twist them, to get our way, we are headed in the Devil’s direction. What was your first impression of what God said? Then don’t mess with it to satisfy your desires!

Satan always sees the glass half-empty. Here they are in a garden in which every need is supplied. If anyone ever had every need met, it was Eve. Satan always points to something you supposedly don’t have. Child of God, in Jesus you lack no good thing. If you don’t have it, you don’t need it, or God will give it to you in His perfect time. Satan’s picture of God is always the opposite of Who He really is. Satan would paint God to be a miserly, selfish, demanding taskmaster when in reality He is the opposite of all those things. You see, Satan’s goal is to make you think God is like him. Subversion of authority, distortion of His Word, and dissatisfaction with God’s character and provision in your life are Satan’s first lines of attack. Don’t fall for it.

Meditation: In Christ I have every good thing.

**January 6 Evening**

Jonah 1:2-4 *2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." 3 But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD. 4 Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.*

Some of the prophets of Israel only ministry was to foreign countries. Obediah’s whole ministry was to pronounce judgment on Edom for standing by during Jerusalem’s destruction. Jonah was sent to the capitol of Assyria, Nineveh. The Assyrians used psychological warfare. They were brutal warriors that skinned captured enemy soldiers alive to cause fear. That makes it a little easier to understand why he would take a ship headed in the opposite direction.

You can run from God, but you can’t hide. It is serious thing to reject a clear call from God. Jonah even told the crew he was running from his God. This must have surprised them, because they had never run from their idols. There is no need, for they cannot pursue. But the LORD God can pursue you. They put the name of each person on the boat on small stones and put the stones in a jar. Shaking the jar, one stone would find its way out and onto the deck, Jonah! God had Jonah cornered. Jonah knew the only solution was to throw him into the ocean. Once they threw Jonah overboard, the LORD calmed the sea, just as He was going to do when He was incarnated.

Are you running from the call of God? Do you know, deep in your heart, that there is something God has called you to do? Is it something you dread? Let God give you a vision of the joy of walking in His will. He will see you through it and mature you in the process. He hasn’t called you to destroy you, but to bless you.

Consider: Running from God is far more dangerous than obeying God in a dangerous situation. He will be with you.

**January 7 Morning**

Genesis 3:6  *6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it*.

Yesterday we saw a few of Satan’s strategies, and in this verse, we see why they are affective. In 1John 2:15-17, John wrote that the world consists of the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. When Satan was able to get Eve to question God, she looked at the fruit. The child of God is to walk by faith and not by sight. We are to see in the spiritual realm what is eternal with our spiritual eyes and not be tricked by what we see in the physical. It looked good for food. Was it? As good as death! But she allowed her eyes to deceive her, instead of trusting in what God had said.

The fruit looked like it could satisfy her natural desires. The world never really satisfies. We often think it can fill the void within, but it leaves us hungrier than before. Like all addictions, there is some satisfaction, but you need to constantly increase the quantity of money, drugs, food, sex or whatever it is you are seeking, to fill your emptiness. Finally that excess ends in an empty death. The void within us can only be filled by the eternal, infinite God.

She thought it would make her wise. There is a grain of truth in Satan’s lies. She would know what it was to rebel against God, to feel remorse, to be separated from His presence, to fear His justice.

These three weaknesses that both this story and the Apostle John described are with us today as much as ever. Recognize them! They are of the world. The world and its lusts pass away, but he who does the will of His Father lives forever.

Prayer: Lord help me to see that satisfaction is found in God alone.

**January 7 Evening**

Jonah 4:2-4 *2 He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. 3 Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." 4 But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"*

A great fish swallowed Jonah. For three days and nights he survived in this fish’s belly. It was a foreshadowing of Jesus’ three days in the grave. Then God commanded the fish to vomit Jonah up on the shore. God gave Jonah a second chance to obey. He did.

He walked through the city proclaiming, “Forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed!” Everyone, including the king, repented with sackcloth and fasting. God saw their repentant hearts and did not send judgment. That greatly disappointed Jonah. He wanted to see his word come to pass. He told God that was one reason he didn’t want to go in the first place, he knew God would be merciful.

In his pouting state, Jonah decided he should just die. God, you can’t live with

Him, and you can’t live without Him. He just won’t do what you want Him to do! In this matter, Jonah was at fault because he did not have God’s heart for the people. He was not gracious and compassionate toward non-Jews, like God is. God asks Jonah a question that He often asks us, “Have you any right to be angry?” Well? Think about it!

To illustrate the point, God caused a vine to grow up quickly and shade Jonah from the heat of the sun. Jonah was very glad. The next morning God caused a worm to kill the vine. Jonah was upset that the vine died. Here is the lesson for us all. We are upset about little things that affect our comfort, should we not share God’s concern about the thousands of lost souls?

Consider: Are you praying for the souls that need Him in nations that are enemies of your country? The LORD wants to share His heart for them with you.

**January 8 Morning**

Genesis 3:15 *15And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."*

This is the first declaration in Scripture that God would deal with sin, and it is made to Satan in the earshot of Adam and Eve. It is in the same chapter as the fall of man. As God is pronouncing the affects of sin upon their lives and the world in which they live, He also gives man a promise and Satan a warning. First there is the declaration that there will be hatred between Satan and man. The seed, or offspring, of the woman will be in conflict with the offspring of Satan. Satan is out to kill, steal, and destroy. (John 10:10) But there is one Seed (singular) that will specifically take on Satan and crush his head (authority and rule). This promise tells us that the Victor will be a male descendent of Eve.

God was quick to give mankind a hope to look forward to by faith. People living before Christ looked forward to the Victor of the enemy of their souls, by faith, just as we look back with faith. We all trust that the crushing of Satan’s head was sufficient to rescue us from Satan’s authority, the authority over us that our sin gave him. In the process the Savior’s heel was struck. Archeologists have discovered that crucified victims were nailed through the heel bone. Jesus’ heels were pierced like the two teeth fangs of the serpent, one through each heel. In the process, Satan’s head was crushed. Satan tried to bite our Savior, but the bite resulted in his defeat and our salvation. The promise has been fulfilled.

Consider: Are you living free from the authority of that defeated one and in the power of the risen Victor?

**January 8 Evening**

Micah 2:11 *11 If a liar and deceiver comes and says, 'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,' he would be just the prophet for this people!*

3:8 (NIV) *8 But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin.* 3:11 (NIV) *11 Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us."*

Micah (Who is like Jehovah) is speaking to the tendency in man to welcome the predictions of blessing, even while injustice is rampant. Man would prefer to believe that things will continue as they are, and that God does not judge. If someone comes and predicts prosperity, we readily swallow the message. We have prosperity preachers in our day also. Jesus says, “Take up your cross and follow me!” His example was anything but a life of prosperity in the physical. The allure of the material draws our flesh to reason against the Spirit.

In contrast, Micah says that he is full of power and the Spirit of the LORD, full of justice and might, to declare the sin of the people. God had anointed and empowered him to preach the wrath of God upon injustice and greed. Yet, in each of the three sections of Micah, we see the mercy of God in a promise of restoration and reign of the coming Messiah. There is only one solution to the heart of man, the Messiah, our Savior. When we speak out against sin, we are often condemned as being critical, and legalistic. If we want the power of the LORD and His Spirit upon us, we must speak the truth.

The leaders no longer labored for the Lord, but for financial gain. Did they even know that the anointing had left their ministry and that they faced the impending judgments of God?

Consider: Speaking the truth will often cost us the world’s favor, but the favor of God is incomparably more desirable.

**January 9 Morning**

Genesis 4:7 *7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."*

The first two brothers must have been taught by Adam to give an offering to the Lord. Perhaps the offering was a way of giving thanks for the abundance of the earth. It may have looked forward to the promised One that would deliver them from the dominion of Satan. God was pleased with Abel’s offering of a lamb, but not with Cain’s grain offering. We don’t know why, except that God looks upon the heart. This verse tells us that Cain’s heart was not right with God when he gave the offering. It was not the gift itself, as we later see acceptable grain offerings in the days of Moses. Cain’s offering was a representation of his heart. He did not do what was right in his heart, and so, his offering was not accepted.

One sin leads to another. That is the warning God gave Cain. In fact, like a lion waiting to devour us, sin waits to devour our lives. The loving heart of God reached out to Cain with the warning that sin would like to dominate him, to be the authority over him, bringing him to destruction. But then God told Cain the correct response is to master it. Don’t let it master you.

Is there sin crouching at your door, waiting to dominate your life? Master it! Don’t allow it to master you. We master it, just as Cain could have, by looking to the work of the Seed to come, the Savior. Because of what Christ did, we can master it! His resurrected life gives us the power to master it rather than be devoured by it.

Cain was about to plot a murder because of jealousy. Read the verse again.

Think about how this verse applies to you each time that you give in to temptation. You can stop the cycle or go deeper into it.

Consider: If you are caught in a cycle of sin, you can still master it by the power of the risen Christ, the Seed that crushed the rule of Satan.

**January 9 Evening**

Micah 5:2, 4-5a *2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over*

*Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."*

*4 He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. 5a And he will be their peace.*

When the Magi came to Jerusalem to ask where the Great King would be born, those who studied the prophesies quoted this verse. They knew the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Perhaps they thought His ancient origins were in David, or even further back in Abraham. They may have even pondered that His origins were in the King of Salem, Melchizadek, who met with Abraham. But did they guess that His origins were even before time began?

He was predicted to *stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the LORD.* He had certainly brought them spiritual food and drink. (John 6) His answers and miracles showed Him to be standing in the strength of the LORD. The prophecy goes on to say that He would shepherd in the name of the LORD. That means shepherding with the authority of Jehovah. The religious leaders were often asking Him what authority He claimed when He spoke and acted as He did. He not only represented God, He is God!

*They will live securely.* *“Do not fear those who can kill the body, but fear Him who can cast both body and soul into hell.”* Jesus brought a security that went beyond the physical. He has freed us from the second death and the slavery of sin in this life. His greatness has reached the ends of the earth. He is our peace with God. He has given us His own peace.

Consider: The religious leaders stayed with Herod while the wise men went to worship Jesus. Go to Him and lay your gifts at His feet. Find His peace, and let Him shepherd you.

**January 10 Morning**

Genesis 6:5-6 *5 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.6 The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.*

'*Nacham*' means comforting sorrow, regret, pity. That describes God’s heart over man’s condition in that day. Seeing man choose sin and its destructiveness, grieved the heart of God. It '*atsab'* (pained or vexed) God’s heart to see our choices. Something had to be done to stop man from torturing himself and his fellow man (vs. 11). A cleansing of the earth had to take place. I have the same feeling, to a degree, when I must spank my children. I cry and hurt with them, but I know it will be better for us all in the future. This verse reveals the heart of God against sin and what it does to us through our own choices. God does things that He knows will be painful to Him and to His creation at times but with a good end in mind.

Sin had mastered most of mankind, like it mastered Cain. God works to bring about the least amount of pain within the boundaries of His justice. He works with this end in mind, bringing many sons to glory. The flood came to spare mankind from themselves. At times we question God’s justice, but we can always be sure that His heart is for man, who is made in His image. It was with a grieved heart full of pain that He directed Noah to build the ark. It will be with a grieved heart that the next great purging of the earth takes place by fire (2Peter 3:7-12) under similar conditions among mankind. We are watching the rapid erosion of man’s thoughts and inclinations. As it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be at the coming of the Son of Man.

Consider: Guard your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

(Proverbs 4:23)

**January 10 Evening**

Micah 6:6-8 *6 With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? 7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

When you begin to understand the holiness of Almighty God, you know you must worship Him. What could you bring that would please Him? The ancients offered animal sacrifices. For the life they had received, they offered the life of an animal that they were custodians over. The valuable products of daily life, meat and oil, were offered in thanksgiving and honor to the Great Provider. Some cultures sacrificed their firstborn to be right with God. The God of the Bible said He never asked for that from man. What can we do about our offenses, the sin of our soul? Micah tells the people that they already know. God had shown us what is good. He has shown us His requirements.

The first listed is *to act justly*. Greed had perverted justice in the legal system and in the business world. The poor were taken advantage of. The second requirement was *to love mercy*. They had hardened their hearts toward having any mercy, not realizing God was extending immeasurable mercy to them at that very moment. The last requirement was to *walk humbly with God*. They, in pride, had turned their backs on His laws.

If the people Micah addressed took to heart these simple requirements of God, they would have repented and pleaded for God’s mercy. The change in their lives would have brought about a new lifestyle that reflected God’s attributes. Instead, they went through empty religious rituals.

God requires the same things from us. The only way we could ever walk in justice, mercy, and humbly with God is through the life of Christ in us.

Consider: We often think God is after sacrifice. He is after a heart yielded to Him. That results in acting justly and with mercy and humility. Is your heart yielded to Him?

**January 11 Morning**

Genesis 6:8-9 *8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. 9 This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.*

In that world filled with violence, where man had corrupted all their ways, there was one man who dared to be different. Noah did not go with the flow of the world around him. He found favor (KJV ‘grace’) in the eyes of God. How could he do that? Just as Abel before him, he looked to the promise of a Deliverer and by faith believed that God would provide a way for him to be right with God. He leaned on the grace of God and not his own good works. The author of Hebrews tells us Noah “*became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.*” That is the reason he could be considered righteous. That trust in God was translated into a lifestyle of obedience to God.

Then we have that wonderful expression that says, “*he walked with God.”* Adam had walked with God in the Garden of Eden. Enoch, Noah’s great-grandfather, walked with God and was translated into heaven. And now, this man Noah, had found a way, by grace, back into the wonder of living communion with God. Because he walked with God, he was blameless among the people. This is the call of God to everyone, to walk with Him, to live in communion with Him. When we do that, we get God’s perspective on our situations and choices. We walk by faith and not by sight. We have a sense of reality that the world around us does not have. The product of living in that heavenly perspective is a life blameless among the people of our time.

Consider: Are you walking with God? It begins by finding grace through what Jesus did for you. It continues with daily communion with Him. Genesis 6:22 (NIV) *Noah did everything just as God commanded him*.

**January 11 Evening**

Habakkuk 1:13 *13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?*

2:3-4 *3 For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. 4 "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright-- but the righteous will live by his faith…*

The prophet Habakkuk listed his complaints before God. He argued from his knowledge of the glorious attributes of God. It is not as though we are convincing God to be of the character we know Him to be; we are assuring ourselves. We are encouraging our faith when we recall who He is.

In this passage, Habakkuk reminds himself of God’s holiness. If evil men are devouring those more righteous than themselves, surely God will bring judgment in His perfect time. We may know what God will do, and yet not know the time in which He deems best to act. He may show us clearly in a revelation or in His Word what will come, yet we do not know the day or hour. Many prophets died before their prophecies were fulfilled. God has an appointed time for all things. His timing is unquestionably perfect.

Habakkuk knew God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. He also knew that what is required of the righteous is to live by their faith. That means to go on believing in the character of God regardless of the present conditions or circumstances. This verse is quoted three times in the New Testament. (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38) Live by your faith!

Meditation: Know that God is unchanging and will always be true to His perfect attributes. He will show Himself just, holy, and faithful in His perfect time.

**January 12 Morning**

Genesis 6:18 *18 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark--you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you.*

The ark is a type of Christ. Judgment was about to end the misery man was inflicting upon himself, but God was going to make a way to spare some from that judgment. There is only one door in the ark, (vs16) just as there is only one Door through which we can enter to escape God’s judgment. (John 10) There is no other provision made for escaping the wrath of God that was about to come upon the earth. In the ark, the only direction to look out was up. The window was in the top. In Christ we look out on the world with an upward look. Once Noah, his family, and the animals had entered, *“Then the LORD shut him in”*. Gen. 7:16b The Lord Himself seals us into the new life with His Spirit. He confirms His covenant (promise) with us. The promise Adam and Eve had heard, that there would be One that would crush the head of Satan, then ran through the lineage of Noah. God has provided an ark for all who will place their faith in Him, Jesus Christ.

Noah’s entire family entered the ark, just as the Philippian jailer’s family did. (Acts 16:34) Are you and your family safely sealed in the ark? Have you entered into the New Covenant in Jesus’ blood so that He will be your ark that bears the brunt of the judgment of God while you are safe in Him? The storm will come, and the whole earth will be purged. Those in Him will step out into a new world, purged of violence and sin. The promise is for you and your children. Enter in today!

Prayer: Thank You Jesus for being an ark for me, for bearing the brunt of God’s righteous judgment on sin.

**January 12 Evening**

Habakkuk 3:17-19a *17 Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, 18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. 19a The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.*

JOY! It is not based on any circumstance in the physical world. That reactive happiness is fleeting at best. It is a shallow joy that knows no depth or duration. The prophet knew that the judgments of God were going to fall on his nation because of their rebellion against God. He declared that it would not affect his joy. He rejoiced in the LORD, Jehovah, the unchanging One. Though the world changes constantly, Habakkuk found reason to rejoice in the unchanging God. He knew the character of God was faithful and true, always loving and yet righteous. He would be joyful in God, his Savior, regardless of circumstances.

Do you really know this type of joy, or is your joy the shallow joy of circumstance? Do you know the greatness of the God who has said He will never leave you or forsake you? Can you rejoice in the love that will never change, and be joyful in the God who has saved you from sin and the wrath to come?

In the last verse Habakkuk declared the Sovereign LORD as his strength. He didn’t trust in his own ability, but in the endless resources of his God who rules over the affairs of men. He closed his prophecy with a declaration of where he finds his joy. “He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to go on the heights.” Others may wallow in the world below, but God enables me to run with Him on the high places, far above worldly concerns.

Consider: Do you let the LORD enable you to run on the heights with Him? It is not escaping. It is putting things in their proper perspective.

**January 13 Morning**

Genesis 12:1-3 *1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

God called Abram (later to be changed to Abraham) out of his culture and family to follow God to an undisclosed place. It seems that, of all the people of the earth, Abram was selected for a very special calling. Later we see he did not follow exactly, as he disobeyed God by taking along his family instead of leaving them. He also lied twice about his relationship to his wife to save his own hide. Still, he did go out by faith, not knowing his destination.

The promise that all the world would be blessed through him makes us wonder if this lineage of the Seed of the woman that will crush the head of Satan, that has gone down through Noah, is not now through Abraham also. Later we find this to be the case. He is an imperfect man that is a recipient of great promises. He obeyed, but not fully. Is that not true of us too? Imperfect though our lives are, though grace, God has called us out of our world to be citizens of a place that we are going to by faith. Like Abraham we believe there is a city with foundations whose builder and maker is God.

We are those who have been blessed through Abram, because we have received Jesus’ work in our place. Perhaps that is why Matthew begins his genealogy of Jesus at Abraham. You may have stumbled along the way to your heavenly home and your reward, but like Abraham, God will see you through. In Hebrews there is no record of Abram’s failures, only his great acts of faith.

Meditation: In heaven there will be no record of your failures either, just your acts of faith.

**January 13 Evening**

Zephaniah 3:17 *17 The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."*

There is a need within the heart of man to be appreciated and valued. That is why the one requirement God places on a wife is to respect her husband and for the husband to love his wife. We desperately need that respect.

Though these words were spoken from God to the Jewish people, all of God’s children can claim them. In Christ, we are His children, and God is delighted with us. Imagine that! Just like you are delighted with your children, or someone who is very dear to you, God delights in us. Your parents probably took great delight in you when you accomplished something. God takes great delight in you because Jesus accomplished something for you and you accepted it. When God sees you, He sees the accomplishments of Jesus. Think how delighted that makes His heart.

He is so delighted in you that He breaks out in song. Have you ever done that? Were you so delighted in someone you loved that you threw together a song that just came bubbling up from your heart? Think on God feeling that way about you! Whenever we feel unappreciated, a lack of respect and a lack of value placed on who we are, we need to remember these words. Of all those we could be valued by, wouldn’t you most want God to value you? He does. That should still our hearts.

Consider: Do I value my great God like He values me? When was the last time I erupted into a song of joy for who He is?

**January 14 Morning**

Genesis 15:10-12 *10 Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half.11 Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.****12****As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.*

God entered into a covenant that was an ancient ritual in Abram’s day. It was to verify an inheritance or to confirm an alliance. Animals were cut in half, and each party would walk through the blood. They were in picture saying, “If either party breaks the agreement (covenant) let us be like these animals, chopped in half and our blood shed.” In this case, God alone walked through the blood while Abram was in a deep sleep. It meant that God had promised to pay with His own blood if either party broke the agreement.

The parties involved would often exchange weapons. That meant that your enemies are now mine and mine are yours. We will fight beside and for each other. They would also exchange their purses. Your wealth is available to my need and mine for yours. Again, since Abraham did not go through the blood, this is a very one-sided agreement. God has committed Himself to protect and provide for Abraham and his descendants. What a promise for Abraham and his heirs, whom we are by faith! (Galatians 3:29)

Sometimes the covenant had to be reconfirmed if there was doubt as to the commitment of either party. The confirming of the covenant would be to exchange sons. The son of Abram was offered on Mount Moriah, and so was the Son of God. God so loved the world He gave His one and only Son. Abram’s descendants did break the covenant over and over. Eventually when the perfect time had come, God did pay with His own blood, on the cross.

Meditation: God is my Protector and my Provider. He confirmed His covenant by giving His own Son. What a gracious God!

**January 14 Evening**

Haggai 1:4-6 *4 "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" 5 Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. 6 You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."*

The Lord says that the circumstances in our life are His call for us to consider our ways. If there is a lack of blessing or provision, then there is something we need to think about. There is some reason. That reason is often to have us consider the condition of our heart.

After the exiles returned, they rebuilt the altar and the foundation of the temple. Then the enemy attacked with accusations. The people moved their efforts to their own homes. They got comfortable in this switch of emphasis, so God gave them some discomfort. It reminded them that they had forgotten their original focus. Problems in life should cause us to seek God. They should call us to give attention to what God is saying to us. It is the faithfulness of God to get us back on track.

Do you see circumstances as a natural set of occurrences, coincidences? ‘Coincidence’ merely means that two events coincided. The question of why they coincided remains. If your god is small, he had nothing to do with it. If your God is the Sovereign Lord of all, He, at least, allowed it for a reason. Jesus taught something very similar to Haggai’s message. *“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”* Matthew 6:33 Give careful thought to your ways.

Consider: Have I been ignoring the powerful hand of God in my life today? How should I respond?

**January 15 Morning**

Genesis 15:6 *6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

Salvation has always been by grace through faith. God reached out to Abram and gave him promises of a son and of possession of the land. God promised his descendants would outnumber the stars, and Abram believed. The apostle Paul wrote, *4 Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness*. Romans 4:4-5 (NIV)

He went on to say that this is before the law and before circumcision. Abram had done nothing but believe God, and God credited it to him as righteousness. This shows us that the way to God is simply believing God, not keeping some set of rules or performing some action. It is when we receive what God has said and accept it as truth.

Throughout the ages, man has come to God in the same way. Only the death of the Son of God in our place makes it possible for this transaction. The righteousness credited to us is the righteous life of Jesus. Since God never changes and does not have a different set of standards for different people, we can see all mankind comes to God in the same way. God reveals Himself to man, and man either believes God or turns from God and trusts self. Paul wrote that this grace that brings salvation has appeared to all men. We need not worry that God will be unjust and damn forever those who never had a chance. Creation testifies of God, and the Spirit of God shines on every heart to give each of us an opportunity to believe.

This does not let us out of the responsibility of sharing the plan of salvation, for that is the Great Commission. It does, however, show us that God loves the world and is not willing that any should perish.

Consider: All will have an opportunity to do as Abram did, believe the LORD. Do you really believe Him?

**January 15 Evening**

Zechariah 2:10-11 *10 "Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the LORD. 11 "Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you.*

As Jesus road down into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the religious leaders asked him to quiet the shouting crowds. They were asking for this prophecy to not be fulfilled. That is why Jesus said that if they were quiet the rocks would cry out.

The word will be fulfilled in spite of what man does.

Why are we to shout and be glad? JHWH (Jehovah) has come to live among us. Not only did the Word become flesh and walk among us, but now He has come to live in our very hearts. Where Christ is there is joy! Many of our churches are altogether too quiet! There is definitely a place for reverential quiet as is mentioned in the following verses, but there is a place for a shout of joy also. Think about it! God has come to live in you! He has redeemed you and invites you to fellowship with Him. He will guide you each day and direct your paths. Wahoo! Perhaps one reason unbelievers have a hard time believing us is that the fantastic story we tell them does not match our expression.

Verse 11 tells of the wonder of the Gentiles becoming the people of God. In the first days of the new church, this was still interpreted as Gentiles converting to Judaism. It took years before they realized this meant a personal relationship between the Gentile believer and JHWH. *I will live among you and you will know…* Is the first *“I will live among you”* the incarnation, and the second the infilling of the Holy Spirit? Certainly, when we are filled with the Spirit, we know that the JHWH Tsaba has sent Jesus to us. Do you know the Eternal God of the Armies of Heaven has sent Jesus in the form of the Holy Spirit to line in you?

Consider a shout for joy! After your shout of joy, do what verse 13 commands us to do, and be still before Him.

**January 16 Morning**

Genesis 16:11-13 *11 The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery.12 He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." 13 She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."*

Hagar had been abused. She left her security because she would rather take a chance at running away, even if it meant the risk of death. Things must have been pretty bad. There she was in the desert thinking that no one cared, that no one heard her heart. Jesus met her in her hour of need. Yes, the angel of the LORD is Jesus. He told her she had a son in her womb and to name him ‘God hears’, Ishmael. God heard her misery. She is not the one that was chosen to carry the Seed, but God heard her misery. He hears us in our most desperate circumstances. We may think no one else understands, but the angel of the LORD does. He hears our misery.

The sons of Ishmael have fulfilled verse 12. Then she said to the LORD who was speaking to her (notice the angel of the LORD and LORD are used synonymously) *“You are the God who sees me…”*. Not only does God hear our misery, but He also sees our circumstances. He cares. God sent her back to Sarah, and she was able to go. Now she knew God saw and heard, and that was enough. It should be enough for whatever circumstance we face too. He sees and He hears. Know that He is with you and understands like no one else can. You do have One to Whom you can turn. He has heard and seen all you have been through. “No one ever cared for me like Jesus.”

Meditation: The Lord hears my misery and cares. He comforts those that mourn.

**January 16 Evening**

Zechariah 3:8-10 *8 "'Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associates seated before you, who are men symbolic of things to come: I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. 9 See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day. 10 "'In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree,' declares the LORD Almighty."*

Those who were seated there are said to be symbolic of things to come. I believe these are the patriarchs and types and shadows of Christ in the Old Testament. They are symbolic of the things to come, colon, God’s servant the Branch. Later on, Joshua is called the Branch, because he does become symbolic of the Branch to come. This reference is to the reality, Jesus. See Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 33:15. The true Branch is a descendant of David of the tribe of Judah. This man, Joshua, is a priest and therefore of the tribe of Levi. Joshua would join this group of men whose lives were a foreshadowing of Jesus, if he walked in the ways of the Lord.

The stone, Jesus, is referred to as the rock, the rock of offense, the cornerstone, and the capstone. A rock is something solid that remains. In Revelation chapter one, John sees the seven spirits of God before the throne. There are seven eyes upon this rock in front of Joshua. In several ways we see Jesus in this rock. And the LORD Almighty says He will (future tense) engrave an inscription on it and remove the sins of the land in one day. When were the sins of a nation ever removed in one day? Good Friday! And what was the inscription on the rock? What marks on the rock have to do with our salvation? Isaiah 53 tells us, “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted.” They are strikes of the Engravers tool on the rock.

Consider: There, forever on display for the spiritual world to see, are the marks that verify our redemption.

**January 17 Morning**

Genesis 17:1,10 *1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. 10 This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised.*

Abram was in the middle of a long spiritual journey. We think spiritual maturity happens overnight, but it would be many years before Abram was ready for the big test of his faith. Part of the process of his spiritual growth was to continue to walk before God. He was always in God’s presence, but he was asked to live in the awareness of that. Are you conscious of God surrounding you throughout your day?

How was Abram to be blameless? Can anyone be blameless? We have already seen how he was declared righteous. It was simply by a trusting belief in God. God declared Himself to be El Shadday (God Almighty), the all-sufficient God. All that Abraham needed for righteousness, for daily direction, for provision was in Him.

To live in the belief of that is to continue to walk by faith, and that pleases God. Is God El Shadday to you? Where do you turn for righteousness, daily direction, and provision? It is sad that many of us turn to self, as if God is not sufficient and needs our help.

When Abraham entered into the covenant of circumcision, his name was changed from Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of many nations). Circumcision was a symbol of a tender heart toward God (Deut. 30:6). A tender heart makes it possible for us to be fruitful, to be productive for the Kingdom of God. God has asked three things of Abraham and all mankind: walk in God’s presence, be blameless (a trusting obedience by faith), and have a tender heart towards Him. He can meet all our need if we will live in a trusting relationship with El Shadday.

Prayer: Lord, help me walk before You blameless and with a tender heart.

**January 17 Evening**

Zechariah 4:6-7 *6 So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty. 7 "What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of 'God bless it!*

*God bless it!'"*

Zerubbabel was concerned that he will not be able to finish the work the Lord had called him to do. The obstacles before him seemed like a mountain that had to be moved. There were political enemies, threats of physical violence, and the people who were doing the work had their own concerns for family and safety. Then the angel of the LORD conveyed a message from the LORD to Zerubbabel. It is not by might or power, but by the Spirit of the LORD that things are accomplished. What a relief those words must have been to him. The message went on to say that the mountain of obstacles would become level ground. He would bring out the final finishing stone while the people shout blessings on the finished Temple.

Many of you reading this devotional probably look at your church and see a mountain that must be moved before it can be the church God wants it to be. How in the world will you get from here to there? It is not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the LORD. Man often intervenes with his power and might and ends up making a bigger mountain. Ask the LORD to do it by His Spirit. Act only at His leading. You will bring out that capstone with the people shouting, “God bless it!”

Certainly all of us look at the temple of our body and wonder if the work of sanctification will ever be completed. The mountain seems too big. Do you think, “Maybe if I try harder. Maybe if I use this discipline or that program?” *It is not by might…* Just cooperate with the Spirit of God living in you.

Meditation: Commune with God, cooperate with His leading, and He will finish the work He started in you as the saints and angels cry, “God bless you!” (1John 3:2)

**January 18 Morning**

Genesis 17:17 *17 Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?"*

18:12 *12 So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?"*

When the LORD came to Abraham, before the destruction of Sodom, He promised that Sarah would be the mother of the son of promise. Abraham had already had a son through Sarah’s servant Hagar. He had “helped” God out by using a custom of the time. The help he gave God was going to end up being a great heartache. As children of God, we have customs that are different from those of the world around us. We are separated as citizens of heaven and need to live in the ways of our new culture and not that of this passing world.

When the LORD told Abraham that it was through Sarah that the promised child would be born, Abraham laughed at the thought of 100-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman having a child. When you think about it, it is kind of funny. But God delights in the impossible, so that we know it is God’s doing and not man’s.

When Sarah heard, she laughed too. The difference is that Sarah was laughing at God. God responded, *“Is anything too hard for the LORD?* Genesis 18:14 What can we learn from the two laughs? I think God delights for us to see how impossible it is for man to do something. Go ahead and laugh at the impossibility of what He has promised you. He has promised to make you into the image of His Son. (Romans 8:29) Ha ha ha! No man can do that! What a wild thing to do! Can you believe God would take a person like you or me and do such a thing? Sarah’s laugh said, “No. It is not possible even for God!” God says, “Nothing is too hard for me! Watch and see, for in My time it will come to pass.”

Meditation: The One who brought it pass for Abraham is the same capable God who promises to make you like His Son.

**January 18 Evening**

Zechariah 12:1-3 *1 This is the word of the LORD concerning Israel. The LORD, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares: 2 "I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. 3 On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves.*

It is easy to see why the Jews got mixed up about Jesus first and second comings when you read the prophecies in Zechariah. In some cases, a prediction of His first coming is followed by the second in the next verse. There would only be one more prophet, Malachi, between Zechariah and John the Baptist. No wonder he speaks so much of the coming Messiah and the ultimate restoration of Israel.

In our passage today we see the final great battle of Armageddon. The armies of the world surround Jerusalem. In these last three chapters of Zechariah’s prophecy, we see the purging of Israel, their repentance and acceptance of the Messiah, and the Messiah’s establishment of His reign over the earth. Look at your newspaper today. There is probably an article on the conflict over this tiny nation. It is not even 1% of the landmass of the Arab nations that surround it, and yet it has become an immovable rock. Time and time again the Arabs have tried to move it, only to injure themselves. It is the zeal or jealous love of the Lord that is accomplishing this. The Creator of heaven and earth made a covenant with Abraham, and He is keeping it. Yes, it has been kept in the spiritual sense, but reading these last three chapters of Zechariah, you can see that it will be fulfilled in the Messianic Israelites as they recognize Jesus as their Messiah.

Consider: The fulfillment of this prediction of the immovable rock should cause us to turn our eyes to the eastern skies. His return is close. Are you prepared to meet Him in the air?

**January 19 Morning**

Genesis 19:12-14 ***12*** *The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here-sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here,13 because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."14 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.*

Angels had come to deliver Lot from the city of Sodom before it was destroyed. The angels were willing to deliver all those related to Lot. I wonder if the outcry to the LORD against its people was from the citizens of Sodom. Sin has a way of torturing those it has mastered. The people refused to be freed from the sin by forsaking it. To stop the misery that sin caused, the people had to have their lives cut short.

Lot warned his sons-in-law of the impending doom, but they seemed to think he was joking. Why wouldn’t they take him seriously? Was it because Lot’s life was so compromised that they couldn’t imagine he would be the special recipient of an angelic mercy mission? After all, he sat in the gate as an official of Sodom, and he probably joked around with the best of them. He probably fit right in since he had become a judge. I believe his compromised life caused his message to sound like a joke.

There is a no less serious judgment coming on all the earth (2Peter 3:7). We have been given a message and a chance to go out and warn others too. When they see our lives, do they consider our message a joke? Or do our lives add credence to our message? The way we live will add power to, or detract from, the message. Let us live in such a way as to add conviction to the words we speak so that others may be spared from the impending wrath of God.

Consider: Does my life show that I believe my message?

**January 19 Evening**

Malachi 2:13-15 *13 Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. 14 You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. 15 Has not [the LORD] made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.*

Malachi means ‘my messenger’. The Temple had been reconstructed. The people of Israel were sliding back into some of their old patterns. They could never be the people God intended them to be without a miraculous heart change. The LORD pointed out some of their specific sins in Q and A style. He asked the question that was on their heart. Why doesn’t the LORD accept our offerings? How did they know He did not accept them? They knew because their crops were not blessed. Other people ruled over them. The blessing of God was not upon them, and they knew it.

Are you being blessed? Why not? Is it divorce? Men covenanted with the wife of their youth in marriage. God never takes lightly the breaking of a covenant. The two are made one. They are no longer individually His, but corporately His. He asks again, “Why one?” God is seeking godly offspring. Divorce is so devastating on children. It gives the enemy of their soul a foothold for bitterness and self- loathing. It spiritually handicaps the children. Of course God can help them work through it if they seek Him. The point is, for our convenience, we take the easy way out and injure others. The wife in that culture was then left without a means of support and was rarely remarried.

Consider: Guard your spirit. Remember the covenant you made with your wife and with God.

**January 20 Morning**

Genesis 21:10-11 ***10*** *and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."* ***11****The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son.*

Sarah had enough of Hagar and Ishmael. She now had the son of promise. The

Apostle Paul tells us this is a picture of Judaism and Christianity (Galatians 5:22, 31). The one was an effort of man trying to bring about the promises of God through human effort. The other is the promise coming to pass by faith. Eventually all our human effort to please God must give way to what God does for us by grace through faith. Those born in the natural way (human effort) will persecute those born of the promise (by grace through faith). All your striving will not make you like the Son. Only a yielding to His life in you can transform you so that His life comes through.

The human effort was causing Abraham a great deal of pain in this passage. He loved Ishmael greatly. He had grown attached to the product of his human effort. That is only natural if that human effort is a son, but we grow attached to our religious efforts as well. When it was time for him to go, Abraham was greatly distressed.

Some of our human efforts, works to please God, ‘good’ things but things not done at the direction of the Spirit, will have to pass away too. Can we honestly recognize that they are the product of our human efforts and let go of them in preference to the things of God? It will hurt, but that is because we have grown attached to our own ways.

Consider: Is there a religious effort I need to let go of?

**January 20 Evening**

Malachi 3:8-10 *8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse--the whole nation of you--because you are robbing me. 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”*

This time their question is “How are we to return to you?” The LORD reminded them of their poor excuses for offerings (1:6-14), worthless leftovers. It was a reflection of their evaluation of God. Someone once wisely said, “Show me a person’s check book, and I will tell which god they have chosen.” We invest in what we believe in and in what we think is best for us. A person of faith lays up treasure in the Kingdom of God because his heart is there. A person that lives for self invests in the pleasures and security of this world.

In chapter one, God asked where was the honor and respect that was due Him? We are indebted. We have received everything from His hand and He deserves an expression of our appreciation. Though 100% is His, He gives us a guideline of 10%. The word ‘tithe’ literally means 10%. We are no longer under the Law of the Old Testament, but we are under the principles that God was expressing to His people. The principle is that we are indebted to God. We should give at least 10% back to Him to demonstrate that all we have is His. It is an expression of faith in His continued provision.

Refusing to yield to God what is due Him results in a curse. That is not to twist our arm into giving, but to discipline our heart into realizing all we have is from Him. It has also been said that the last part of a person to be converted is the wallet. Perhaps that is because it represents our control over our life.

Consider: Take a look at your check ledger and let God speak to you about the condition of your heart.

**January 21 Morning**

Genesis 22:1-2 ***1*** *Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.* ***2****Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."*

Isaac was one of the greatest foreshadows of Christ. Throughout this story, we have pictures of what will happen in the life of Jesus. Isaac’s birth was miraculous. He is the son of promise, the only son, whom his father loved. On the mountain

Moriah (the same place Jesus was sacrificed), he carried the wood for his execution. Since Abraham is well over 100, I assume the boy was willingly bound by his father, just as Jesus willingly went to the cross. We will not read of Isaac again until he receives his bride. These are amazing parallels for us to see that God is in the details and knows the end from the beginning.

In this passage, God is said to test Abraham. God does not tempt us, but He does test us (James 1:13). God will test us to strengthen our resolve and to help us realize where we are in our growth in Him. His tests help us get off the fence and stand squarely in the kingdom of God.

He calls us by name. He speaks just as clearly today as He did to Abraham. What seemed like a great burden, and to be inconsistent with God’s character, turned out to be a great blessing. It is now a great badge of honor that Abraham believed God’s promise to the extent that he knew God would raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:19). He told his servants “WE will return to you (22:5).”

Consider: What has God promised you? Will you lay it down and trust God to bring it about in His way and time? Can you surrender it back to God, like faithful Abraham did?

**January 21 Evening**

Malachi 4:2, 5-6 *2 But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.*

*5 "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. 6 He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and* *the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."*

The Old Testament closes with promises. Those who revere the name of the LORD can know the sun of righteousness will rise upon them with healing in its wings. In the Revelation given to John, he saw the heavenly city did not need light, for the Lamb was the light of it. Those who revere the name of our eternal God can look forward with hope to the reign of Jesus, to living in the presence of God.

The final words predict the next prophet, the final person to hold the office of prophet in the Old Testament sense. Jesus declared that John the Baptist was Elijah (Matthew 11:13,14). He comes again before the Day of Judgment. The reason he comes is to turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers. John’s message was one of repentance. He called on people to deal with heart issues that blocked the way of the Messiah’s entrance into their hearts.

They were to have a change in the way they thought.

Our culture expects children to be rebellious and for fathers to have little devotion to their children, but this is not God’s intention. In fact, it is the reason He will smite the land with a curse. Parents are to nurture their children, and children are to honor their parents. This is a reflection of God’s relationship with us. Being right with God includes right family relationships.

Consider: Are your family relationships a picture of heavenly relationships? If they aren’t, what changes do you need to make?

**January 22 Morning**

Genesis 22:7-8,14 ***7****Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"****8****Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.*

***14*** *So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."*

And God did provide Himself as the lamb, the lamb of atonement that took away the sins of the world. For almost two millenniums the Jewish people asked the same question. Where is the lamb? Where is the One who will satisfy God? Shepherds could not provide the lamb; He had to come from the Great Shepherd. And in the fullness of time, God did provide the Lamb. God the Father and God the Son went together, the two of them, to Mount Moriah.

Abraham looked forward through time and saw the LORD providing the Lamb of God in that same spot. *"On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."* On that mountain, atonement for you and me was provided. In father Abraham’s case, the knife was stopped mid-air, but Father God allowed the piercing of the Son He so greatly loved, to bring many sons to glory. God knew the grave could not hold the One who is Life, but that did not lessen the pain of the Son or the Father in that torturous death on the cross. It did not lessen the separation that took place when the sins of the world were placed upon Jesus and the forces of hell were unleashed upon Him. Child of God, God has provided for you the Lamb to take away your sins.

Consider: Am I living a life of thankfulness for that provision?

**January 22 Evening**

Matthew 1:17, 20-21 *17 Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.*

*20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*

Matthew is the first Gospel of the New Testament (New Covenant). Gospel means ‘good news’. He was writing to the Jews and connected the life of Jesus with the predictions throughout the Old Covenant.

Abraham was the father of faith and the father of the Israelites. He was the man with whom God covenanted to bless the earth through his seed. David also entered a covenant with God that promised his seed would reign forever. 42 generations passed before the promise to both men came to pass. That is six sets of seven. Six is the number of man, and seven is the number of God. The fulfillment of the promises was going to be the God man, Christ Jesus. The blood of a child is inherited from the father. The life of the flesh is in the blood. Mary was every bit this child’s mother, but the Father of this child was God. Jesus was not born with a sin nature, but other than that, his physical being was just like yours and mine.

Joseph thought that Mary had been unfaithful to him during the engagement, and considered a divorce. A dream reassured him that the child was supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit. The custom of the time was that the father had the responsibility of naming the child, and in this case He did. He told Joseph the babe’s name was to be Jesus. Jesus means the salvation of Jehovah. Christ is a title meaning ‘anointed one’ or ‘Messiah’.

Consider: What does it mean to us that He was every bit man?

**January 23 Morning**

Genesis 25:23 ***23*** *The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."*

The unnamed servant of Abraham went to Haran and sought out a wife for Isaac. If we follow the analogy of Isaac being a foreshadow of Christ, then this servant is like the Holy Spirit seeking the bride of Christ. He finds Rebecca and takes her from her father’s house without delay. When Rebecca is joined with her husband, she finds this war within her. Is that not true of us, the bride of Christ. The flesh is warring against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh (Galatians 5:17).

The custom of that day was for the firstborn to receive twice as much as any other heir along with the responsibility and authority of the father. That has carried down to this day in many Eastern countries, but God reversed the order with Abraham’s sons and Isaac’s sons, and others. The picture is that the first born, the flesh, must serve the second born, the spirit. There must be a separation as God predicted to Rebecca. We have to set the flesh aside, crucify it with Christ, and refuse to serve it. Even more than that, we must master it.

Which one is the stronger? If we look physically, by sight, we would say Esau. Notice the prophecy says ‘one people will be stronger’. If we look at the people descended from them, the Jewish people have been stronger spiritually and in persistence. These two are at war, even as I write, through the nations they have become. There is a war within you, Christian brother or sister. You must set the flesh aside. The Spirit is stronger. Don’t for a moment believe the flesh is. The older will serve the younger. See that it is so by yielding to the life of the Jesus in you every day.

Meditation: *“For sin shall not be your master.”* Romans 6:14a (NIV)

**January 23 Evening**

Matthew 2:1-2, 11 *1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."*

*11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.*

The Magi came from the East. It seems most probable that they are from the area of ancient Babylon. They may have still had access to the ancient writings of Daniel, who himself was considered Magi (one of the wise men) serving the kings of that area. Daniel had predicted the time of the coming Messiah of the Jews. Knowing from those writings that the time was near, these men were probably waiting for a sign of His birth.

God gave them their cue. Upon coming to Jerusalem, they asked Herod where the new king was born. Paranoid Herod the Great inquired of the Jewish scholars who knew from the writings of the prophet Micah that the place of His birth would be Bethlehem. Herod feigned a desire to worship this new king also, and asked them to bring a report of where they found Him. He was actually planning to assassinate the King of kings.

God led the wise men to Joseph and family. Jesus was then a toddler. They did what they had traveled all that way to do. They worshipped Him. Then they presented the gifts: gold for a king, incense for a priest, and myrrh, which speaks of His death. (Isaiah 60 tells us He will be given the first two gifts at His second coming.) This toddler would be the ultimate fulfillment of King and priest and would die in our place. Daniel had predicted his death also. The money would finance the family’s flight into Egypt, escaping the paranoia of Herod.

Consider how much effort and thought these men put into worshipping Jesus. Then, think about how much effort and thought goes into your expression of worship.

**January 24 Morning**

Genesis 28:15 ***15*** *I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."*

Jacob had bought his brother’s birthright and stolen his blessing. As he fled from his brother Esau, he had an encounter with God at Bethel. There, God promised many things to this rascal. Nothing is really asked of Jacob. True, Jacob valued the blessing but went about obtaining it in an ungodly manner. Once God had expressed the blessing and promises to Jacob, Jacob went about cutting a deal. Allow me to paraphrase it. “OK, if you protect, feed, clothe me, and get me back here safely, tell you what I’ll do. I’ll give you a tenth and worship you here. Then

I’ll adopt you as my god.” (I use the little “g” intentionally.)

How patient God is with us! Jacob had just been told how blessed he was, in spite of his deceptions, received promises he didn’t deserve, and then he talked to God as if God needed him! If we will look deep within our own heart, we will find the same is often true of us and our requests of God. He has given us promises as great as the ones He gave to Jacob, and we still wheel and deal with Him as if He should be grateful for our worship.

Prayer: Oh Lord, open our eyes to who You are and all that You have promised us. Help us to worship and adore You and ask in humble gratitude only the things that are in your will for your glory and honor.

**January 24 Evening**

Matthew 2:19-20, 23 *19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20 and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene*."

When Herod the Great died (4 BC), the angel of the LORD spoke to Joseph in a dream. It was the same way God spoke to Joseph about taking Mary as his wife. It was the same way God sent them down into Egypt. We often wonder if we are still in the will of God. We heard from God once and obeyed, but are we still supposed to be where we are? You can trust God that if He changes His plan for you, He can speak again just as clearly as the time He sent you there. It is a good rule of thumb to expect God to reveal any changes in His direction with as clear a leading as you received when He sent you that way. God has no difficulty speaking in a way we will understand. Our problem is most often either endurance or willingness to hear.

Notice that God used dreams to communicate to Joseph. God can work uniquely with each individual. Don’t expect God to be limited to using dreams. Don’t expect other to hear from God in the manner that you do. Matthew wrote that their return to Nazareth fulfilled a prophecy that the Messiah would be a Nazarene. Scholars once thought this meant a Nazirite. We know that cannot be the case, for Jesus drank wine. Nazareth may be derived from the Hebrew word *“Netzor,”* meaning a branch or shoot. Nazareth may have been a city inhabited by descendants of David who were looking forward to the fulfilment of the promises of an eternal king descended from David. In that sense, the Messiah would be called a shoot of David, a Netzorean.

Further study on *netzor* – the branch: See Isaiah 11, 53; Zechariah 3 and Jeremiah 23:5.

**January 25 Morning**

Genesis 32:27-28  ***27*** *The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered.****28****Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."*

After Jacob recognized his dependence on God, he was met by an “angel” that he later called “God”. He wrestled with this angel all night. He had really been wrestling all his life, wrestling with his own will and ways against God’s will and ways. That wrestling had not produced a winner. God continued to bless him but not like Jacob could have been blessed if he would have let God win. Still, Jacob had never walked away or quit wrestling. This is what the conversation in this passage is about.

In that age, a name implied the person’s character. It was almost as if it was your destiny to fulfill its meaning. Since Jacob had come to this turning point in his life, God changed his name, implying that he was a new person. Jacob meant ‘laughter’ or could also mean ‘deceiver’. His new name implied that he was enduring with God. In other words, he had not given up but continued to allow God to be a source of conflict and change in his life.

When you come to Jesus and allow Him to be your Savior and Lord, he changes your destiny too. As you wrestle with Him through life, you become an overcomer also. As He wins more and more of the battles over your will, you become dependent upon Him. You learn that God’s will and ways are really better for you than you could desire for yourself.

God calls us to see what we are and where we are headed, *“What is your name?”* Then He changes our name and destiny. God crippled Jacob’s hip to cause an additional dependency and reinforce the lesson.

Encouragement: Has God blessed you with a crippling of some kind? Keep enduring with God, overcomer. He has good things planned for you. Learn to depend on Him alone.

**January 25 Evening**

Matthew 3:1-3 *1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the*

*Desert of Judea 2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." 3 This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"*

Matthew keeps connecting the events of his day with the prophecies of the Old Testament. John the Baptist was the one that was foretold to come in the spirit of Elijah, to prepare the way for the Messiah. He was actually a distant relative of Jesus, and only about 6 months older. We don’t know if they had any contact in their youth, but we do know Mary visited John’s mother, Elizabeth, before John was born (Luke 2:39-56).

There had been no prophetic voice for the last 400 years, so the people rushed out to hear him. It was a good day or two journey from most cities to the wilderness area where John was preaching. His message was simple, “Repent! The kingdom of heaven is coming and you’d better get your heart ready for it.” Repent means to change your way of thinking. John was telling them that the way they looked at the world was not God’s way. Their thoughts were not in line with God’s. They needed a new perspective. There were roadblocks in their hearts that would keep the Messiah from entering in. If they didn’t move them now, they were going to miss Him.

His message is one that can be preached until the day of Jesus’ return. Is our thought life in line with God’s? Are we seeing things from His perspective? Do we value the things He values, or do we have selfish priorities that have nothing to do with what really matters?

Consider: Stop for a moment, and look down the roadway of your heart. Is it a smooth highway prepared for Him? Are the welcome banners out along the side of your road, or are there signs that say, “No entry without permission”? Prepare the way for the Lord; make straight paths for Him.

**January 26 Morning**

Genesis 40:14 ***14****But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison.* 41:1 (NIV) ***1*** *When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile,*

Joseph had dreams from God that predicted his brothers and parents would bow down to him. The dreams and his father’s favoritism caused his brothers to envy him. The brothers sold their 17-year-old brother to slave traders. They concocted a deceptive story for their father saying that a wild animal had killed him. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Joseph was elevated to the chief servant over the household of his first master. When the master’s wife wanted him sexually, he would not betray God or his master by yielding to her. Her false accusation landed him in prison.

In time, he rose to second in charge of the prison. The Pharaoh’s butler and baker were confined there, and Joseph interpreted their dreams. The butler’s dream meant that he would be reinstated, and so, Joseph uttered the above Scripture. But when the butler was restored, he forgot his vow to tell Pharaoh about this young man, now 28 years of age. He had served faithfully for years as a slave and for more years in prison. We never read one word of complaint. Just when there seems to be light at the end of the tunnel, the butler forgot, and Joseph remained imprisoned.

The darkest hour is just before the dawn. I don’t think he ever doubted the God given dreams, but it sure must have seemed hopeless at times. After these 14 years of servitude, anyone would be discouraged. Yet, this was God’s college for kings. In one day, he went from being a servant of the jailer to the second highest position in all of Egypt, the most powerful nation in the world.

Encouragement: Don’t give up on the vision and promises of God. He will bring them to pass in His time and His way. God’s ways are vastly different from mans

**January 26 Evening**

Matthew 3:10-12 *10 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

John the Baptist saw Jesus coming as a time of separating the good from the bad. His illustrations included cutting down the trees that don’t bear fruit, and separating the grain from the chaff. Jesus will use the same illustration in John 15 when he describes burning the fruitless branches. What is a fruitless tree? What is chaff? Here are two possible interpretations.

There are those lives that will never allow Jesus entrance. Their every action and deed is ultimately selfish. Even those that appear to be gracious have some self-seeking motivation behind them. There is nothing of eternal value to that life. Hell is the gathering of the selfish.

We could also say that there are branches and chaff in the life of every believer. These are areas in which the life giving sap of the Holy Spirit does not flow. It comes with being a fallen creature, but it only remains because we allow it. A gardener prunes the branches that have died and those that will bear no fruit. They rob the rest of the tree of sunlight and nutrients but produce nothing in return. Jesus has come to clean up our life. He brings the life giving sap of the Spirit. He also brings a fire that burns away that which robs our life of fruitfulness. The end product of us giving Him the freedom to work in our lives is fruit that remains. That means treasure in heaven, substance of eternal value.

Consider: Are you a fruit-bearing tree? If so, which branches need pruning? Are there some fruitless ones that are keeping you from being more productive for the Kingdom of God?

**January 27 Morning**

Genesis 50:19-20 ***19****But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?****20****You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

Once Joseph’s father had died, his brothers thought Joseph might now get even with them. They pretended that their father’s last words were, “Please forgive your brothers.” The Scripture today is Joseph’s response. Joseph knew that only God could judge and reward men for their actions. He left all judgment to God and assured his brothers that he would not take any action himself.

Then he went on to tell us a wonderful truth. God can take what man intends for evil and use it to save lives. The brothers had malice, envy and greed in their hearts, but God used the action they took to get Joseph into Egypt. He used a lustful wife to get him into prison. He used an ungrateful butler to tell Pharaoh about a man who could interpret dreams. God does not author the evil, or condone it, but He uses the consequences of the actions to serve His purposes. All things do work together for good to those that love God and are called according to his purposes (Romans 8:28).

In this story we see the omnipotence and sovereignty of God. He can use even the evil in the world to serve His purposes. What an amazing God! We do not need to fear that evil is out of control. God is on the throne of heaven. Though man sins against God and against us, our God can use it to bless our lives and the lives of others. Don’t be discouraged. Our God is over all and will use all things to bring glory to Himself. His glory fills the earth. Trust His all-powerful hand to bring about good in whatever situation you are facing.

Meditation: God is never caught off guard by the evil of man. He causes all things to glorify Him.

**January 27 Evening**

Matthew 3:16-17 *16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

The Spirit of God had revealed to John the Baptist that he would see the Spirit descend in the form of a dove upon the Messiah. That was to be the sign by which John would know he had found the Lamb of God. Even before this happened, he somehow knew Jesus was the One. When Jesus asked to be baptized, John said that he would rather Jesus baptize him. Remember, John had been declaring that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. But Jesus, our perfect example in all things, insisted that John baptize Him. John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. The only reason that Jesus would be baptized is in obedience to the Father. He had nothing to repent of. Since the Father instructed Him to do so, He insisted that it was necessary to fulfill all righteousness.

Once John baptized Him, the sign that John had been watching for came to pass. In addition, a voice came from heaven! John must have needed these confirmations because Jesus’ calling was so radically different from John’s. John ate a strict diet. Jesus ate and drank freely. John isolated himself in the wilderness. Jesus mingled with every kind of people. This contrast may have caused John to doubt, for when he was in prison he sent word to Jesus asking him if He was indeed the Messiah.

The voice also commended the Lord for His obedience. Jesus, being all God and yet all man, may have wondered if the Father was indeed pleased with Him, since He was led to the baptism of John, that of repentance. In walking in continued obedience, the Father audibly confirmed He was His loved Son with Whom He was well pleased.

Consider: If you are ever tempted to think God is not pleased with you, remember, if you are in the Son, He is well pleased with you.

**January 28 Morning**

Exodus 2:5-9 ***5****Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it.****6*** *She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said.****7*** *Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"****8*** *"Yes, go," she answered. And the girl went and*

***9*** *got the baby's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you."*

God kept His promise and made Israel a great nation during their 400-year stay in Egypt. In fact, they became so great that the Pharaoh ordered all newborn baby boys thrown into the Nile to keep them from becoming too powerful. There was a spiritual war taking place. The time had come for the LORD to raise up a deliverer, and Satan knew it. He planted fear in Pharaoh’s mind so that he would kill the male babies being born. He used the same tactic when Jesus, the Great Deliverer, was born. But the Divine hand of God works even through the evil of men to save lives, just as we saw in the account of Joseph.

The mother of Moses put him in a basket, and Providence guided the basket to the place where the Princess of Egypt had come to bathe. Baby Moses cried, and her heart melted. God will use the most powerful of nations to give His deliverer an education in all the world’s wisdom. He would have to make a choice between the world and his God.

Who was hired to nurse and care for him but Moses’ own mother. I love the way God so utterly turns Satan’s tactics around to bless the children of God. It may seem like the enemy has brought defeat into your life. Remember, the enemy fights the most vehemently when he senses deliverance is at hand.

Encouragement: Hold on, and trust in the wonderful ability of God to turn your circumstances into a mighty victory.

**January 28 Evening**

Matthew 4:4, 7, 10 *4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*

*[[1]](#footnote-1) Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'*

*10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the*

*Lord your God, and serve him only.*'

Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, yet without sin. After fasting for 40 days, Satan came to tempt Him. Remember that the Father had just spoken with an audible voice from heaven saying, “This is my Son.” Now Satan asks, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to be turned into bread.” People lose their appetite while fasting until the body begins to consume itself. Clever, the way Satan ties the doubt of who Jesus is to His physical need. You, reader, are not the Son, but you are a son. Satan often tempts us along this same line. “If God loves you so much then why…” Jesus acted as our perfect example. He could have revealed His glory. He could have called for legions of angels, but instead, He quoted the eternal word of God. Life is more than just the physical.

The second temptation included the same “if”. This time Satan quotes

Scripture. “Take matters into your own hands Jesus. Quit waiting on the Father. Just do what it says here, throw yourself off this pinnacle. Then You, and everyone in sight, will see the angels bear You up. They’ll know You are the Messiah.” Jesus answered with another Scripture, “Don’t put God to the test.”

In the last revealing temptation, Satan declares that the world systems and their glory are His to give to whoever will worship him. He has always been seeking worship. He is willing to make a swap, the entire world systems for Jesus’ worship. Could Jesus skip the cross and go straight to His kingdom? No! “Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.”

Consider: Is the Word of God your offensive weapon?

**January 29 Morning**

Exodus 3:2, 7 ***2*** *There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.*   
*7  then the LORD said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard them crying out because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings,*

The angel of the Lord is referred to by rabbis as the Prince of the Countenance. We know Him as Jesus, the visible manifestation of the invisible God. When Moses made his choice to side with his people, he had to flee for his life from the very people that had raised and educated him. In the wilderness of Midian, he received the second half of his training. Now he knows he can do nothing. He is humbled and ready to be called by God. Most of us would rather skip the last half of God’s training, but it is essential. Without it we end up polluting what God would do with our own wisdom and ways. When Moses was prepared, Jesus met with him.

This is the same Jesus of the New Testament that looks on people with compassion. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Heb. 13:8) God said, “*I have seen their misery and heard them crying out*…” God is concerned about suffering wherever it takes place and to whomever as we saw in the story of Hagar.

We are made in His image, and He loves and values each life.

It is argued that the God of the Old Testament brutally destroyed lives and therefore is not like the New Testament God. He does end life when it is so corrupt and perverted that it only causes pain. He is the same just but merciful God in both testaments. If you are experiencing pain and suffering, know that God sees your misery and hears your cries. He will bring a change or see you through it because of His great compassion.

Meditation: God is concerned about suffering and I should be also. His life in me will demonstrate His concerns.

**January 29 Evening**

Matthew 4:18-20 *18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 20 At once they left their nets and followed him.*

This was not the first time they had met. John tells us that they had even baptized people at Jesus’ direction while at the Jordon River. They had seen His miracle of turning water into wine and believed in Him. Luke tells us that this call came after the miraculous catch of fish. The expression, *“Follow me!”* is used 19 times in the Gospels. To get a sense of this expression and its forcefulness, think of it used to call your dog when he is running off. “Come back!” It can also mean, “Come behind me!” When He first met them, He asked them to “accompany” Him. (John 1:43) Now He is telling them that it is time to become a follower. In doing so, they will learn a new occupation, netting men. Not everyone is called to leave their occupation. The Apostle Paul told the Thessalonians that they should be employed.

We are all called to learn from Jesus the art of netting men and to learn of Him. We tend to want to learn from others, or imitate their methods. Jesus knows our gifts and make up. He will teach you in the way He has uniquely designed you.

If you are called to “Come after!” you will know it is the LORD. Many enter into ministry at the first call to “accompany me!” Then they wonder why they struggle so. They would be more fruitful to work within the occupation they left. Right there in the business world are those who could be reached by a consistent testimony from a fellow worker. If the call comes to “Come after!”, everything that is your old way of life is left behind. Your old security nets, the things with which you are familiar, are forsaken. You cast yourself upon God, and He teaches you your new calling.

Consider: In either case, learn from Him.

**January 30 Morning**

Exodus 3:11-12 ***11*** *But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to*

*Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"* ***12*** *And God said, "I will be with you.”*

Indeed, who is anyone that we should be sent by Almighty God as His messengers? That is a great wonder to the humbled servant of God, that God could use a person like me. The Apostle Paul understood it as much as anyone when he said that God chose him, the worst sinner, to demonstrate the greatness of God. We can say with Moses and Paul, “Who am I?” Sinners saved by grace! It demonstrates that God can use anything when He uses us.

We must not stop in just seeing our weakness, but must go on to look upon

God’s all-sufficiency. What does it matter that I am limited? God is not limited!

And if He has sent me, then He must empower me. Moses explained to God (as if God was unaware) that he was not a gifted speaker. God answered, “Who made man’s mouth!” We can credit Moses with being humble, but obviously he needed to learn some lessons in the ability of God to use the members of man as His instruments (Romans 6:13).

*“But Whom shall I say has sent me?”* Moses asked. God answered, *“Tell them I Am that I Am has sent you.”* The “I Am” in Hebrew is Jehovah, the eternal God. He is the One to Whom the past, present, and future are always now. It seems strange for man to question the Eternal God, yet how typical of man. We want to know how God will do it. We want to know ahead of time how to face situations, because we have so little faith. We fear we will be embarrassed.

Consider: *"I will be with you*.” Isn’t that enough for you to trust Him for the outcome?

**January 30 Evening**

Matthew 5:1-3 *1 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them, saying: 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Jesus had a different approach than many ministries of today. Instead of going for numbers, He sought to train a small group who could teach others. God wants to work through us. He has always desired to include us as co-laborers.

Everyone is immersed in a society that has a way of viewing the world. Without even realizing it, our thinking is shaped by our culture. Jesus was from a heavenly culture. Those who followed Him on up the mountain were about to be taught the heavenly way of thinking. God’s ways are very different from the cultures of man. One of the Christian’s chief areas of growing into maturity is learning the mind of Christ. If we want to go on with Him, He will teach us the difference between worldly thinking and godly thinking.

This passage is called ‘The Beatitudes’. Each phrase begins with the word ‘blessed’. The Greeks saw this word as applying to complete satisfaction in the hereafter. Jesus applied it to the present fullness when a person enters the kingdom of heaven. We could call the Kingdom, “the place where the King reigns.” The first idea He presented is basic to entering into the Kingdom. Here are a few paraphrase versions that try to catch the full meaning of this rich expression: *3**"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.* (Message) *3 "Humble men are very fortunate!" he told them, "for the Kingdom of Heaven is given to them*. (TLB)*3 "Those people who know they have great spiritual needs are happy, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.* (NCV) Begin by realizing you are unable to help yourself. Then you will find the fulfilling joy of Christ reigning in you. How opposed to the world’s view!

Consider: Have you come to that heavenly realization? You have to start there.

Climb on up the mountain and hear Him.

**January 31 Morning**

Exodus 4:1-2 ***1*** *Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you'?"****2*** *Then the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" "A staff," he replied.*

Moses is still worried about whether he would be accepted and believed. “*What if…”* We always have our “what ifs”. They are usually a description of our fear and our lack of faith in God. What if we just trusted God and obeyed by faith? If we have to voice “what if” then turn it into a positive “what if.”

God then pointed Moses to something already in his possession. “*What is that in your hand?"*  What has God already given you? It is a useful instrument or a gift or talent, but when God anoints it for service to Him, it becomes supernatural. It was just a staff to guide sheep, but what if it becomes a rod to guide a nation?. It will be an instrument that brings plagues on the enemy. It will be an instrument to part a sea and drown an army. It will be an instrument to strike a rock and bring forth water for a thirsty nation. It is just a staff. But when it is used as God directs, it will be God’s own instrument to bring His intervention into the world.

And what is in your hand? What has God gifted you with? It may seem very ordinary, but what if it is yielded to God and used at His direction? It can become extraordinary.

Prayer: May the Lord turn all my “what ifs” into positive ones and the things He has given me into His instruments.

**January 31 Evening**

Matthew 5:6-8 *6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*.

While on the mountain with his disciples, Jesus taught them about the Kingdom of heaven way of seeing things. Most of the Hebrew world had a future hope of bliss in the afterlife, but Jesus said people are filled with goodness right now. What kind of people? The ones who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. He didn’t say they might attain it. No! They will be filled! The Greek sense in this expression is that of continually being satisfied with the righteousness of God. That fullness is used to create an increasing desire, which is in turn satiated with more of the righteousness of God.

The merciful take on the heartaches of those who are suffering. They mourn with those who mourn, feeling their sorrow. That person will reap what they have sown. When they are sorrowful, people will comfort them, sharing their pain.

The pure in heart are those who continually come to God for His cleansing. They see their need and know the solution to it is the wonderfully gracious forgiveness of God. They’re continual coming for cleansing, and their desire to increase in holiness is rewarded with an increasing revelation of God.

The perspective of man is that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness might be filled if they do all the right things. Jesus says the desire is the key, not a perfect performance. Man’s perspective is to be happy about possessions. Why share some unfortunate person’s pain? Jesus tells us we are fulfilled and insure our own comfort when we share other’s pain. Man’s perspective is the pure in heart are full of head-knowledge. He thinks a lucky revelation has happened upon some unsuspecting person giving him secret wisdom. Kingdom thinking is that the pure heart is rewarded with revelation of a very personal God.

Consider: Are your thoughts in-line with Kingdom thinking?

**February 1 Morning**

Exodus 4:22-23 ***22*** *Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son,****23*** *and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.'"*

Egypt is a picture of the world. Pharaoh is like the prince of this world, Satan. Those who are called of God are born into the world and are under its dominion. But when the LORD calls them out, the prince of this world will not readily let them go. He desires their servitude. He wants their worship and abhors the thought of them worshipping the LORD. His answer is always, “I will not let my slaves go.”

The LORD calls those He will deliver His firstborn. He claims them as His own children. The firstborn have rights and privileges as heirs of their father. The Father calls us out of the world to worship Him. We have been serving Pharaoh, but we are to serve him no more. Now we are to come out from the world (2Cor 6:17) and worship God.

The very strange thing is that some people consider the constant grind of the master, sin, to be a thing of pleasure. The quota of bricks is always increased and we have to gather the straw on our own, but we still prefer Egypt (the world). We are so driven that we find no time to worship the LORD. The subtle Serpent has deceived us into thinking slavery is a good thing. He points to the things that fill our senses, the leeks and garlic, and says the servitude is worth it. It is death (Romans 6:23). The quota will be increased until the taskmasters work us to death. Jesus is the Great Deliverer. He has come to free you from slavery to the world, so that you can worship Him.

Consider: Have you come out and begun to worship, or do you find yourself so driven that you have no time to worship?

**February 1 Evening**

Matthew 5:10-12 *10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

In Jesus’ teaching about the upside down world of the Kingdom of heaven, He shares where true fulfillment and joy are found. He is helping His disciples think like He does. His thoughts are so unlike the world. The men in the world that the disciples respected were those who sought the praise of men for their way of life. They lived for the respect and honor that men gave them.

Jesus taught that real blessing came when people persecuted you because of your righteous living. The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who walk in righteousness when the world hates them for it. Don’t shrink back and get quiet when you see the world’s hostility toward your godly attitude, speak out! We are here to make a difference. In the previous chapter, Satan said he was the one that possessed the kingdoms of this world. Therefore, when you walk in righteousness the world will hate you, not honor you.

When that happens you can rejoice and be glad. Your difference is so noticeable that it has drawn attention. You have joined the ranks of the godly that have gone before you. The world persecuted them too. The ones that really stand out get killed. God blesses the ones that endure the wrath of the world with heavenly reward. They are living for heaven, not this world. What about you? It may depend on how Christian your culture is, but even in a Christian culture you will suffer loss for living a righteous life that puts the pleasure of God above that of pleasing men. You might not be physically injured, but you will face ridicule and rejection for standing for the things of God instead of giving in to the whims of man.

Remember: Be strong, people of God. We are supposed to be a contrast to the world. Live to please the Father, not men. As long as He is pleased, you can rejoice and be glad.

**February 2 Morning**

Exodus 7:16-17 ***16****Then say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert. But until now you have not listened.****17*** *This is what the LORD says: By this you will know that I am the LORD: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood*.

The indictment against Pharaoh is that he will not listen to the LORD. God is always speaking in the world to set the captives free. Are we listening or are we as guilty as Pharaoh? When we refuse to listen to God, that is, not just to hear but to take to heart, then He must use more drastic methods to get our attention. He would not listen because he had respect for other gods. They are not truly gods but just creations that the LORD had made. God began to show Pharaoh that Jehovah alone is God.

The most revered god of Egypt was the Nile. It was the first to be touched by plague. Each plague struck something that Egyptians worshipped. When you read the story, notice that during the early plagues Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Even though God has demonstrated that Pharaoh’s gods are nothing, he refused to take the word of God to heart. About halfway through the plagues, God hardened his heart. Pharaoh had enough evidence that the LORD is God, but he would not yield.

Now the real god of Pharaoh honors is obvious. It is Pharaoh himself.

The things that we refuse to hear the LORD tell us to forsake will be taken from us or shown to be worthless. What will we do when we find the real god we have worshipped is self? Will we turn around before we cross that line?

Meditation: Hear God today. Take to heart what He speaks to you.

**February 2 Evening**

Matthew 5:13-15 *13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.*

Jesus’ words capture the imagination. He speaks with such depth of meaning that you can see the words on a number of levels. In this passage He employs two metaphors. He calls those who believe in Him salt and light. It is an expression that is meant to help us see our role in the world as He sees it. He is continuing to teach the disciples Kingdom thinking.

Salt has to stay salty to be of value. If you lose your flavor, your distinctiveness, then you have lost your value. The Christian brings savor to life. His presence brings the perspective of the Holy Spirit and that completely changes the way things are seen. The Spirit points out eternal realities. He takes the mundane and fills it with eternal importance. The world needs your saltiness.

Jesus said that He is the light of the world. As Christians, we are the little lights, bringing His light in a way that is comprehendible to man. Our testimony makes the eternal something they can see at work. God is not so distant or unreachable when they see Him at work in our life. But if we hide that light for fear of being different, how is the world to see it? We have something desperately needed by all. Don’t hide it! If you truly have Him you can’t really hide Him. Don’t attempt to hide Him to fit in. The world needs Him! Let the light shine! Let it shine in the world, and let it shine in your home. Let them see Jesus manifested in your mortal life.

Remember: Jesus is the One everyone most desperately needs to see.

**February 3 Morning**

Exodus 12:13 ***13*** *The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.*

The Exodus is a story of deliverance. After God showed the Egyptians that He was greater than all things they worshipped as gods, they still refused to let the Israelites go to worship Him. The last plague was the death of the firstborn.

Pharaoh was worshipped as god by the Egyptians, and his son would take his place.

This was the last god of the Egyptians to be plagued, because God is merciful.

God gave His people a way to escape the angel of death. They were to take an unblemished lamb and kill and eat it. The blood was to go upon the doorposts. If the blood marked their dwelling, God would pass over (*pacach*) them. The word in Hebrew is used of a mother bird hovering over her chicks. God is not going to hop over their home, but stand as their protector, their shield (Isaiah 31:5). If the blood was applied, no destructive plague would touch them.

The Lamb has been slain. The Lamb God promised Abraham that He would provide died on Calvary. His blood was spilled that you and I could mark the doorposts of our home. When we do, we can be assured that He will hover over us to shield us from the plagues that come upon the world (Psalm 91). It is not that we will not face difficulty and tests, but that they will not be destructive to us. Instead they will grow us. The trials will be productive instead of destructive, and so we can count it all joy when we face them. If the blood is on your heart, the Lord will *pacach* you. The Destroyer will not be allowed to enter your dwelling.

Prayer: Keep me safely under the shadow of Your wings, Lord Jesus.

**February 3 Evening**

Matthew 5:27-29 *27 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*

In Matthew 5:21, Jesus begins a string of 5 contradictions to commonly accepted sayings of the day. Each begins with “You have heard that it was said…” Then Jesus gives His correction with “But I say unto you…” The culture in which we live has commonly accepted ideas that we absorb without much thought as to their validity. Jesus was correcting the perception of those ideas in the culture of the people of God. He was getting down to the spirit behind the letter. They had focused on the technical meaning of the letter.

The people of Jesus’ day knew that they were not to commit adultery. Jesus redefined what adultery is. His corrected interpretation included the action of the heart. The people of that day were adept at skirting around the edge of the Law. Jesus said that was a vain effort. Sin is too destructive to interpret in such a confined sense. Sin begins in the heart and mind of the individual before it becomes manifested outwardly. Sin is so destructive, so detrimental to our lives, so anti-God and all His goodness, that every form of it must be avoided. To play on the edge of a 100-meter cliff is to invite death.

It is so dangerous that Jesus recommends the amputation of any body part you can’t bring under control. That is much better than the just judgment that would be yours. From the context of Scripture as a whole, we see that Jesus is talking about anything in life that would keep you from yielding your heart to Jesus as Lord. His presence in you can bring victory over your carnal desires. We crucify them with Him on the cross and live in resurrected life, new life. Has something kept you from inviting Jesus to reign in your heart? Whatever it is, it is not worth it.

Consider: Take Jesus’ serious advice to see the source of sin, your heart. Then surrender your heart to His control so that you don’t find it necessary to become a blind, deaf and voiceless quadruple amputee.

**February 4 Morning**

Exodus 12:22 ***22****Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning.*

The Hebrew word for basin (*caph*) meant a drainage trough at the base of the door that kept rain from crossing the threshold and muddying the house. That is why it is sometimes translated threshold. Follow the Israelite head of his home as he takes a specific type of branch, hyssop, and from the base of the door marks the top and the sides. What has he just done? He has made a cross with blood over the entrance of his dwelling.

Now come forward in time over a thousand years to a hill just outside a gate of Jerusalem. There is a man bleeding from his feet, his head, and his hands. Jesus is bleeding there for you so that the Destroyer cannot take your life. A Roman soldier grabs a branch with a sponge on the end to moisten Jesus’ lips (John 19:29). What kind of branch is that? Hyssop!

Jump forward to today, two millenniums later. Night has come upon the earth for the world is in darkness, but in the house of the Lord there is light. Morning is coming. A new day will soon dawn, but until it does, you had better stay in the house (the fellowship of believers). The Destroyer is out in the streets and anyone not behind the cross of blood is fair game to him. *“In Him (Jesus) is life and the life is the light of men.”*

Consider: The message has remained the same for thousands of years. My soul is safe behind the cross of blood shed for me.

**February 4 Evening**

Matthew 5:43-45 *43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is continuing to describe Kingdom thinking. In the five corrections of contemporary expressions of that day, one of the most radical is in our verses for today. If you have not recognized that you are poor in spirit, this might help you see the truth. “Love your enemies.” The society was saying to love your neighbor and hate your enemy. Jesus would later redefine who a neighbor is. He will include anyone that we run into that has a need. Such is Jesus’ value of human life.

When you find someone working to destroy you in repayment for your kindness, you will find out whether or not you have adopted Kingdom thinking. Man doesn’t have the ability to love and pray for his enemy. It just isn’t in us. We can teach it, but when it comes down to personal experience, personal loss and pain, it breaks down into gut reaction. Their stinging words won’t stop playing in our minds. We dwell on how we can respond in a way that will wound them and damage their credibility. That is the way of the flesh.

If we are to be like our heavenly Father, we must learn to sow good into lives that are loving as well as those that are captured by sin. Heavenly thinking looks beyond the physical and sees the pain and spiritual bondage of the one who is trying to harm us. Hurting people hurt people. God has been patient and loving with each of us, even when we don’t deserve it. A transformed heart, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, will be towards others as God is to us. In heartfelt understanding, and appreciation for God’s goodness to us, we will sow the fruit of the Spirit to those who have not yet received the love of God. What they do with it is up to them.

Consider: Our responsibility is to sow God’s love, regardless of their response. Then you can be assured that you are sons of your Heavenly Father.

**February 5 Morning**

Exodus 12:37-38 ***37*** *The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children.* ***38****Many other people went up with them, as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds*.

In the area of what was the city of Rameses, where the Israelites lived, archeologists have recently uncovered Hebrew dwellings from this time period. Never forget you are reading true stories as well as the hand of God upon human history, revealing Himself to all who will see. One plague after another hit the things the Egyptians considered to be gods, but God spared the Children of Israel. God was demonstrating the truth to the Egyptian nation in each and every plague. If blessings (Joseph and the dreams of the Pharaoh) will not turn us to Him, then He will allow plagues that, in the end, will be for our good, if we will heed the message in them.

In the above verses, we see that God was successful in converting a great number of them. When the Children of Israel left *“many other people went up with them.”* I imagine this was where Moses second wife was converted (Numbers 12:1). These Egyptians, as new believers, joined this great throng coming out of Egypt. They had seen the true God demonstrate through the plagues that He was the only God. They believed His message. They also saw the lives of the Children of Israel and, though culturally very different, they chose to band with those who followed the true God.

Many are converted today in the hardships of life as they see the gods they cling to cannot save or even help. We must be there with an example that our God does care and will help so that they can join a different nation that is coming out of the world, a nation whose citizenship is in heaven.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, make my life a demonstration of your love that others may want to follow You and be delivered from the world.

**February 5 Evening**

Matthew 6:9-11 *9 "This, then, is how you should pray: "'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread.*

In the middle of Jesus’ exhortation on the many ways Kingdom people are different from the world, He spoke on the issue of prayer. It seemed to be a popular idea that the more you prayed, the more likely God would hear you. Jesus says that the true God knows your need before you ask. Then He gives them an example of prayer. In other gospels, we see that this was in response to the disciples’ request to be taught how to pray.

Notice that this is a prayer to be prayed with others. The pronouns are plural. He begins by addressing God as their Father in heaven. His name is holy! His name is the sum of His attributes. God, in all His wonderful perfections, is pure and set apart. We don’t make requests of spirits or of men but of the perfect Creator of all. That should give us great confidence that our prayers will be heard and answered.

Next, He prays for the kingdom of God to come. He describes that as God’s will being done on earth as it is in heaven. He is asking that the will of man conform to the will of God. He is asking for men to yield their hearts to the Lord of the universe. That is the only way the will of God will be done on earth, at least until He comes to establish His kingdom by force. In that sense, Jesus is asking that the Second Coming take place.

Then He asks for physical needs. Do you see the pattern up to this point? Recognize the majesty and glory of who you are praying to. Ask for His will, that is, for hearts to yield to Him. Then you can come with your physical needs. You might say this includes both physical and spiritual. You need daily physical provision, but you also need daily spiritual provision. I hope you are getting the later as you read these devotions. This alone would be a meager spiritual diet. I hope you get more than this. – continued tomorrow evening –

Consider using this as a pattern for your prayers.

**February 6 Morning**

Exodus 14:12-14 ***12*** *Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"****13*** *Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again.****14*** *The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."*

One minute they were worshipping God for their deliverance, and the next, they were whining about their fears. So it went for the next 40 years. How like us! I think that is one reason God chose the Jews; they so consistently demonstrate man’s vacillation from faith to fear. There before them was the presence of God in the form of a cloud. They saw the angel of God. They had seen the plagues on Egypt, but here, in what looked like impossible circumstances, mountains on two sides, a sea in front, and an army behind, they forgot all that God had done in the past and even what He was doing at the moment. Fear blinds us to spiritual reality. No wonder we so often encounter the words, *“Do not be afraid”* in Scripture.

Your condition is no different than theirs. God will take you to the same impossible places so that you can learn that all you need do is “*to be still”. “The LORD will fight for you…!”* It is God’s will to deliver you from the world and from trust in yourself, so that you can follow Him to the Promised Land. He will fight for you if you will let Him. What would have happened if the Children of Israel had attacked the trained army of Pharaoh, trusting in their own might? God always has a better plan. His plan builds our faith and shows the enemy that the LORD is God.

Scriptural advice: Be still. Do not be afraid. The battle is the LORD’s!

**February 6**  **Evening**

Matthew 6:12-14 *12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

In the last half of the prayer that the Lord taught His disciples, Jesus teaches us the need to forgive others. We are to ask God to forgive our indebtedness to Him in the same way that we have forgiven other’s indebtedness to us. It is human nature to become bitter toward those who have been unjust toward us, yet, we are daily unjust toward God. He pours out so much goodness upon us, but we rarely return the gratitude that is due Him. We rarely respond to His love with the love that is due Him. He asks us to be perfect (5:48). That would mean responding as we should. Yet, He remembers our human condition and asks one thing. Forgive others like you want to be forgiven. Imagine the transformation that would take place in the world if individuals would do just that!

The prayer ends with a request to not be led into temptation, but instead, to be delivered from Satan. This prayer is in recognition of our weakness. It asks for divine intervention to keep us from areas in which Satan would ensnare us. Spiritual people don’t consider themselves capable. They rely on the strength of the Lord. In the Spirit, they know they can do anything the Lord calls them to do. At the same time, they see how weak their flesh is and ask for heaven’s intervention.

The only way they will finish strong is by the grace of God.

The one comment Jesus makes on the prayer is to point back to forgiveness. If you forgive others when they wrong you, you can be assured that God will forgive you. This teaches us that the heart of God desires to see me walk in peace, and longs for strife between individuals on this earth to cease. Are you walking in the light of this?

Remember: Forgive like you want to be forgiven.

**February 7 Morning**

Exodus 15:2-3 ***2*** *The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. 3 The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name.*

The Israelites are now praising again. The enemy is washing up on the shores, and they are freed. But are they? They have escaped the land, but the system and ideas of Egypt are not yet out of them. The enemy is dead, but the nation of Egypt will rise again and harass Israel. This is a perfect picture of us when we are delivered from sin. We are out of the world (positionally), but the Spirit of God will continue to get the world out of us through our experiences in life as we walk with Him (experientially).

They have learned that the LORD is their strength, though when they get to the border of the Promised Land, they will think they are not strong enough, completely forgetting this lesson. May the LORD help us remember that He is our strength!

He is our song! The joy that bubbles up in melodies of praise is the LORD. He is the song on my lips and in my heart. He is my joy, for He has become my salvation. Who is my salvation? Jesus! He has freed me from my enemy. He defeated death, hell, and the grave. That should always be our song and praise, as we exalt the One who has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. The mightiest Warrior is with me. Why should I fear an enemy? If God is for me, who can be against me?

Consider: Let the LORD be the song that rises up in you.

**February 7 Evening**

Matthew 6:19-21 *19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

It’s not about now! The Man from heaven must have been amazed to see how earthly minded we are. The Sermon on the Mount addresses those things people conclude life to be about. It reminds me of the old board game, *Life*. You amass fame, love, and wealth. The person with the highest total of these three wins the game. If you are low on love, just get more wealth. Jesus is trying to tell us that the real experience of life is about something else. Here on this earth, treasure comes and goes. If you are the wealthiest of men you may find yourself penniless by a governmental change. A turn in the financial markets may obliterate your fortune. Wealth here is certainly transitory at best. A hearse is never followed by a moving van. The Pharaohs tried that, and today their treasure sits in museums, a testimony to their folly.

What a mistake to live for now! Life is not about now, but about bringing glory to God. Focusing on fame and fortune means your heart is set on the wrong world. It means your faith is all but nonexistent and your vision is set on the passing things of this world. Where is your heart set? What are you living for? What do you spend your time doing?

Jesus does not speak to condemn us, but to awaken us to our true condition. When we see our faith is so limited that we are living for this world, it is a call to turn our focus to the eternal. A new heart comes with new desire. At the same time, it is also true that a Spirit enlightened mind can direct our actions to change and thereby surrender the stubborn areas of our heart.

Consider: What would your best friend say you live for?

**February 8 Morning**

Exodus 15:25b-26 *There the LORD made a decree and a law for them, and* ***26*** *there he tested them. He said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you."*

The people were thirsty and had come to a place of bitter water. It would have taken an entire lake to give that many people and their herds a drink. They asked if God was able to provide their needs. The Psalmist said they were testing God (Psalm 78:19). Both in the verse for today and in the next chapter, when they demand food, God turned it around and said the test is not if He was able to provide, but it is if they are able to obey. That is still the test. God provides food for every living thing in the world daily. Most starvation is due to wars that do not allow food to enter into areas where there is need. Man gets in the way and will be held accountable. But the point God is making is that if we are listening and obeying His directions, He will provide our needs.

In that day, God gave them health laws that if followed carefully would prevent much of the diseases they witnessed in Egypt. Today we are no longer under those laws but are to be led by the Holy Spirit. If we will listen and obey, we will not need affliction to help turn our ear toward God. When God gave instructions for the collection of manna, He again says it is to test them to see if they can learn to obey. When we operate in a dependency on God, we will always have enough. It is when we go our own way that we find we are in need, because our own ways are not blessed. The test is for us, not God.

Consider: How should I respond to God’s testing?

**February 8 Evening**

Matthew 6:25, 33-34 *25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?*

*33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

In the verse just prior to this, Jesus told His disciples they had to choose between serving God and serving money. Loving one causes a detesting of the other. If you are going to rely on your own ability and what you can earn, your trust in God will fade. If you rely on God and His provision, your trust in self will fade. We all choose where we will place our faith. We may say it is in God, and yet our actions show we are relying on the money we earn.

Jesus is asking a question we should consider. What is life about? What is the importance of life? Is it to be dressed nicely and eat the nicest food? Or is it about the kingdom and His righteousness? You will act on what your heart really believes. Do we live for our taste buds? Once put so plainly, we see the absurdity of it. This is the way unbelievers live. If we have come to believe in the God who desires intimate fellowship with us, then we should be living for much greater goals than food and clothes. Surely, as we live in pursuit of His kingdom and righteousness, He will take care of those things for us.

How worry free the life of the Christian should be! We have a God who provides our needs day by day. We have found life to be more than the physical. We have found that our provision is not from our ability. We may struggle and go through difficulty, but we have purpose and meaning in our life. The great Provider will provide our every need in His perfect time. Rest in Him. Trust Him to be who He declares Himself to be. Focus on the real importance of life, and your temporary lack of a physical need will seem as insignificant as it really is. Before you know it, He will meet the need.

Remember: Stay focused on His kingdom and His righteousness.

**February 9 Morning**

Exodus 16:8 ***8****Moses also said, "You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD."*

After the plagues, parting of the sea, destruction of Pharaoh’s army, and provision of water at Marah, you would think the Jews would have realized that it was God that delivered them and spoke to them through Moses. What does it take for us, after all that we have seen and read, to know that it was God who spoke to us in His Son? Do we know He has been our Deliverer?

The people were complaining about not having anything to eat. “Can God provide a table for us in the wilderness?” What happened to their herds? That was their wealth, but they were unwilling to see them as God’s provision. God will provide quail and manna so that they may be convinced (16:6). How patient God is with us! What will it take to convince us? If we will open our manna, the Word of God, every morning and evening, we will find it is God who gives us our daily spiritual bread. Then our hearts will be convinced that it was indeed the LORD who delivered us. Jesus said, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven.” (John 6:51) “The word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:14) We should collect our daily manna just as the Israelites did.

The last part of that verse is an encouragement to pastors. When your pastor is preaching the Word of God and those in the church grumble against him, they are not grumbling against him, but against the LORD. Be careful whom you oppose as you may be opposing the LORD in them.

Consider: Realize that complaints against men are often a complaint against the

LORD.

**February 9 Evening**

Matthew 7:1-2, 5 *1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

*5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

This has become one of the favorite verses of the Bible, but for all the wrong reasons. The world culture of today would like us to believe that there is no clear cut good or evil. It teaches that what is good for you may be evil to me.

Postmodern philosophy teaches that everything is subjective. In other words, it depends on how you personally experience something in your particular environment. You can see how this verse would suddenly become popular.

Jesus isn’t teaching that there is no such thing as evil. It is very clear from His teachings that He believes in good and evil, God and Satan. What Jesus is teaching is that we need to deal with our own sins first. We need to get our act cleaned up before we go out of our way to accuse others. Recognition of our own weaknesses will help us deal with others in gentle humility. That is more likely to be received.

Without that, we come across as pompous hypocrites.

Jesus is not rebuking those who point out other’s faults. In fact, verse 5 encourages us to help our brother overcome his faults. By recognizing that the measure we use to judge others is the same one that will be used to judge us, we look for the biggest measure of grace and the smallest measure of justice. Ignoring sin only leads to destruction. We can’t do that for others or for ourselves. Let us deal with it the way the Father does. He applies mercy and grace but He does not ignore justice and the need for change. Don’t point you finger at others without dealing with the issues in your own life first.

Consider: What issues have you been avoiding?

**February 10 Morning**

Exodus 17:6 ***6*** *I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel.*

Horeb was the mountain upon which Moses met God in the burning bush. The word “horeb” means “fresh inspiration.” Moses had indeed received fresh inspiration that transformed his life and sent him on his life’s mission. Now he is at the same mountain with several million thirsty, whining people. He needs some fresh inspiration again. It is not as though we meet God one time and go on living on that one encounter. God is after a relationship. Difficulties are often the vehicle that drives us to seek direction from God, a fresh encounter.

Moses told the LORD that the people were ready to stone him for leading them to this dry and thirsty land. It was not Moses but God who led them there to show them their need and His all-sufficiency. First, God reassured fretting Moses by telling him that He will stand before him. Moses knew from experience that if Almighty God was in something, it would turn out fine. Then God gave Moses a strange command. God told him to strike the rock with the staff that God had first anointed in this same place.

In 1 Corinthians 10, the Apostle Paul tells us that this rock is Christ. He is struck, and the life giving water comes out to meet the need of every thirsty person in that great multitude. The Rock has been struck for you and water has flowed in abundance. *"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters…”* Isaiah 55:1a

Encouragement: Drink your fill; He was struck for you.

**February 10 Evening**

Matthew 7:7-8, 12 *7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

*12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*

Man has a tendency to act as if heaven was stingy. We go to God and ask as if His resources were limited. Our poverty in asking, seeking and knocking reflects our poverty of understanding the gracious heart of our Father. He speaks, and resources come into existence. Perhaps we have this mistaken attitude because we so often see people who will not go to Him for their needs. We refuse to hear His answer to our need, and so we continue in our impoverished ways.

God is more willing to give than we are to receive. Heaven is filled with answers to prayers that are yet to be prayed. When we get a right attitude about God’s attitude, we find our own attitude toward giving is changed. If I believe He desires to share His all-sufficiency with me, I have no problem sharing with others in need. Then I can do to others what I would hope that they would do to me. I don’t have that greedy attitude that says I must make sure I have what I need first. Instead, I look at my lack, consider God’s all-sufficiency, give to those that are in need, and go back to my heavenly Father for the replenishing of my need. With resources like that, I can give to anyone that comes my way.

Jesus is giving us insight into why the Law was given. First, it should give us a new perspective of the goodness and graciousness of the love of God for man. That should cause us to love Him in return. Then, it tells us how to live with our fellow man with concern and love. Rebellion (sin) says we are not our brother’s keeper. It says we are only to look after ourselves. The spirit of the Law is loving concern for those in need. Are you walking in the Spirit?

Consider: Do you see how all-sufficient your heavenly Father is so that you can be generous to those He brings your way?

**February 11 Morning**

Exodus 17:12-13, 16 ***12*** *When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up--one on one side, one on the other--so that his hands remained steady till sunset.****13*** *So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.*

***15****Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner.*

The rod of God was in Moses’ raised hands. To the Israelites, this was one of the many pictures that symbolized the power of God with them. The rod had been the instrument of destruction for Pharaoh’s army. It became like a banner to them, like a flag carried before them into battle. It constantly encouraged them that the LORD was present.

We need the same kind of encouragement as we go into battle, especially when it is a hard fought battle. We find the LORD Himself to be our banner. His promises to be with us encourage us, if we keep our eyes on them. But like Moses, there are times when we are physically or emotionally exhausted. It is just plain hard to keep holding the banner high. We need an Aaron and a Hur to come alongside us and help hold our hands up. That is one reason God placed us in a spiritual family. Who do you go to? It is usually those that the LORD has brought beside you at that particular time. It varies through the years so that we do not take our eyes off the banner and place them on one of these helpers.

Jehovah Nissi, the LORD is my banner. If your life has been dedicated to Him, then He is your banner as you go into the battles of life. You know He will be with you. When you grow weary, look around, for He has surely brought along some brother or sister to help hold the banner high until that battle is over. Since we are in a covenant relationship with Him, our enemies are His and His are ours. If God is for us, who can be against us?

Consider: Who has God placed around me to help me hold the banner high? Whose hands do I need to hold up?

**February 11 Evening**

Matthew 7:13-14 *13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*

Contrary to popular humanist opinion, the Master teacher taught that few people have found the path to life. The world is telling us that all paths lead to life. It is teaching that your path is just as good as any other. Jesus flat out contradicts that idea. There is no way around His statement of fact. Either this man Jesus, Whom the world respects as a great teacher, was totally off base, or postmodern thinking is dead wrong. Consider the fact that Jesus’ teaching has stood strong for 2000 years, and postmodern teaching is just another idea in the constantly changing teachings from the intellect of man.

This is a challenge to every person to consider where he or she is headed. Jesus gave only two alternatives, destruction or life. Chances are you are on the road to destruction. Isn’t that what He taught? The majority enters the broad gate. Have you found the narrow gate? Are you sure? And what about your loved ones? Have they found it? Jesus clearly taught in John chapter ten that He is the narrow gate. We must go through Him to find life.

Some folks want to think the broad road doesn’t lead to destruction. Look around you. How many healthy, wholesome homes do you know of? I’m talking about homes where the parents love and spend time with their children, and where the children respect their parents, where all recognize and honor the Word of God. Now do you see that the gate is broad that leads to destruction? Those homes are a rarity. The homes filled with strife and anger, bitterness and rivalry are many. Sin destroys, and that is why the love of God sent His Son to save us from it.

Consider: He is the narrow gate. Enter in and be transformed. Enter in and set your feet on the path of life. Guide your family in, and be whole.

**February 12 Morning**

Exodus 19:4-6 ***4****'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.****5****Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,****6****you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'*

Redeemed from the oppression of slavery; now what? Now obey, and you wont go back into slavery. As a people free from the things that enslave the world, they can be priests to the world. That was God’s intention. He wasn’t just building a little social club. Instead of becoming inwardly focused on themselves, they were placed on the trade routes of the world to be an example of what a nation led by God looked like.

God was about to give them the Ten Commandments. First He asked if they wanted to accept the call. Then He instructed them, through the Law, how to be that example the world needed to see. If they could live that way, they would be priests to the world. In the days of Joshua and some of the reign of David, that was true of them. David’s conquest of Israel’s neighbors brought the influence of the Law to the surrounding nations.

You have been redeemed from slavery too. It is not just to hang out in your church social group. It is to affect the world around you. Though you are not under the Law as your guide, you have a more intimate Instructor, the Holy Spirit. If you have dedicated yourself to being the LORD’s vessel in every area of life, you will need His constant instruction to be the example the world needs. You become a priest to those your life comes in contact with, directing them to the Word of God and showing them an eternal perspective (1Peter 2:5). You are an heir of this promise through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Consider: Obey Him fully. The world around you needs the loving influence of the priests of God.

**February 12 Evening**

Matthew 7:15-16 *15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?*

Jesus taught us to watch out for false prophets. Many people claim to have a message from God. Outwardly it is hard to spot them. The ‘sheep’s clothing’ often causes us to think they are one of God’s children. But the outside and the inside are totally different. For most people, the person who rants and raves and condemns everyone is easily spotted as being off track, but what about these that appear to be gentle and meek? How are we supposed to spot them?

One way to identify a plant is by the leaf, but even then it is easy to make a mistake. Many leaves are similar. The easiest way is to see the plant’s fruit. What does the plant produce? That tells you what kind of plant it is. What is the fruit of the life of the person you are wondering about? Is their home full of peace and love? Are their followers loving and kind? Does their teaching humble the listener or make them proud about having some secret wisdom? A false teacher can imitate the gifts of the Spirit, but they cannot for long imitate the fruit of the Spirit. Watch them when they are not in front of their audience. See them when they think no one else is watching, and you will soon know what kind of tree they are.

The same is true for us. Do you know what kind of tree you are? What would an unbiased observer of your life conclude? Would they say you are a grapevine or a thornbush, a fig tree or thistle? Sometimes we believe we are something we are not. Look at your fruit, and be honest with what your fruit really is. That is the first step toward the transformation that the life of Christ in you will produce.

Remember: Become His fruit and you will bear His fruit.

**February 13 Morning**

Exodus 20:17 17 *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."*

The first five commandments deal with our relationship with God. The last five deal with our relationship with mankind. They are very clear outward actions like not murdering, not stealing, and not lying. Every one is an indication of a problem with the heart. This last one, however, deals directly with the desires of the heart. The Law is a schoolteacher that brings us to Christ. When we consider this last one, we realize that something in us must change. It is not an action that we do but our very desires that must change.

We can want to change our desires, but new desires only come out of a new heart. A new heart can only be given to us by the indwelling life of the Son of God. He’s the only One that can fix our “wanter.” The old heart is always thinking a little more will satisfy it, but no matter how much more we get, it never does. When Jesus’ life indwells us in an unhindered way, we find the problem, we call “keeping up with the Joneses,” is gone. In its place is a desire for the heavenly. We are glad for the prosperity of the Jones’ family, but we desire things above*. “Set your affections on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”*

(Colossians 3:1)

When we sense ourselves breaking this tenth commandment, we are being warned that we are stepping out of the new life of the Lord in us and back into the old self that is motivated by greed, which is idolatry. Then we should yield again to the new life and move back into a walk in the Spirit. Is your “wanter” fixed?

Consider: Are you hearing the schoolteacher as He points you to the life of the Son of God in you?

**February 13 Evening**

Matthew 7:24-26 *24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.*

Jesus ended the Sermon on the Mount with this defining simile. If you hear His sayings, not just with your ears, but deep in your heart, and take action to live by what you have heard, then you will be like a wise man who built his house on a rock. If you have been reading the previous evening devotions, you have seen that the Sermon on the Mount corrected the common thought patterns of man. It pointed to reality and away from man’s erroneous assumptions. It shifts your perspective from the earth to heaven, and that transforms the way you act on the earth.

In this simile, the house you are building is your life. The foundation of your life is either the rock solid truth of the reality of kingdom thinking, or the shifty sand of the world’s temporal and clouded perspectives. Jesus is making it clear that He is not just entertaining them with a demonstration of wisdom. He is giving them truths to build their life on. Upon what is your life built? What is its foundation?

Storms are going to come. Storms are a part of every life. Even the most guarded life faces death in the end. Most lives are filled with storms. This is really a blessing in disguise, for storms help us examine what foundation we have built upon. If our house comes crashing down, we know it has been built on sand. If somehow it amazingly stands through it all, we realize that we have built it upon the rock, the eternal truths of the kingdom. How did you do in your last storm? Is your footing on the unshakeable rock of Jesus’ words? The psalmist wrote, *“I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”* Psalm 16:8

Consider: Have Jesus’ words become your foundation? If not, what will you do about it?

**February 14 Morning**

Exodus 20:18-20 *18 When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance19 and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."*

The people continually had a problem esteeming the word from Moses to be the Word of God. We must remember that this is the age of the prophet, when God spoke to us through men. (Hebrews 1:1-3) Today God speaks to us through the Son. His Spirit indwells us so that we can commune with Him. The reason is still the same. He is testing us. He is instilling the fear of God in our lives to keep us from sinning. Do not think of God as being like sinful man. He is not holding a whip and commanding you to do His bidding or be beaten. He is showing you that the Father knows best. He can see the past, present and future. He sums up all that is truly good. The fear He wants to instill in us is that of His awesome understanding. He tells us to obey because it is best for us.

Imagine how much better off the Children of Israel would have been IF they had obeyed the word from Moses. There would have been no plagues upon them. All their enemies would have been defeated. They would not have had to wander 40 years in the wilderness. The older generation would have lived to see the Promised Land. IF only they had the fear of God that kept them from sinning!

Their sinning says they either did not believe God’s good motivation for His commands or they thought they knew better than God. Our sin says the same today. We have His word. His Spirit speaks to our heart, so that the fear of God will be with us to keep us from sinning. We stand at the same crossroads of blessings or trials.

Meditation: God’s instructions teach me what is best for my life.

**February 14 Evening**

Matthew 8:1-3 *1 When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. 2 A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." 3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy*.

The Jews lumped all types of skin diseases under one category. God had given Moses specific instruction about quarantining those who had skin disease. They were to live apart from others. If anyone approached them they had to warn them by shouting, “Unclean!”. To touch a person that had a skin disease required the one who touched them to go through a cleansing ritual to see if they had contracted the disease. This man’s disease must have been quite obvious. He may have had what we call leprosy. There was no need to tell Jesus from what it was that he needed cleansing.

It is hard to imagine not having the touch of another person for a long period of time. The man must have been not only suffering physically but emotionally as well. As he yelled, “Unclean!”, the people parted as if an invisible wedge cleared the way to Jesus. *“Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”* The man expressed His faith in the ability of Jesus. He called Him “Master.” Jesus does not have servants and great wealth. He is a different kind of Lord. He is Master over His creation.

Then Jesus did something that required faith. He touched the man. If the man was not immediately cured, Jesus would have been considered defiled. Jesus would have to go through the cleansing ritual. Jesus responded, *“I am willing. Be clean!”* His touch and words made the man whole. We cannot defile Jesus. His purity overcomes our defilement. He is willing to touch and cleanse you. Are you suffering? Know that He is willing. He will touch you. His purity is greater than your defilement.

Consider: Jesus is willing to reach out and touch you.

**February 15 Morning**

Exodus 21:5-6 *5 "But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,'6 then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.*

The Israelites had a very humane and self-respecting way of dealing with financial difficulty. If you could not make ends meet, you could sell yourself as a slave for a seven-year period. Very clear laws protected the way you were to be treated. During the seven years you would have food and shelter. At the end of the time, you were set free with resources to begin again.

If you chose to stay with your master, if you found that place to be more suited to you than the outside world, you could give yourself as a lifelong slave to your master. Some slaves found their master to be kind and generous, and life in their service was much more secure and meaningful than struggling to make a way for themselves.

When one decided to do this, his or her master would take the slave to the door of the home. Their right ear would be pierced with an awl to the doorpost. The person would then be a lifelong bondservant. Why pierce the right ear? The door represents the entrance and exit to the home. Now their ear is to be attentive to the needs in this home, attending to its needs alone.

Several of the writers of the New Testament refer to themselves as a love-servant of Jesus Christ. They had given themselves for life to have their ear attentive to the needs of the heavenly home. They would no longer consider a life outside in their own house but now turn all their attention to the directions given them in their new home.

Consider: Have you become a bondservant of Jesus? There is no better Master and no more meaningful service. Is your ear His?

**February 15 Evening**

Matthew 8:8-10 *8 The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 10 When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.*

A centurion came to Jesus to ask for the healing of a servant that was suffering terribly. Romans typically thought of servants as tools that were discarded when worn out or damaged. This Roman, who was probably a battle-hardened overseer of 100 soldiers, had a heart. He must have heard about the crowds that came to Jesus and were healed. It inspired faith in him to believe that this man, Jesus, had ability beyond that of ordinary men. Having been assigned to that region, he knew the Jews’ deep faith and devotion to one God. All these factors put him in a difficult position. His culture was radically different from that of the Jews, and yet he found hope and power in this Jewish Rabbi.

When he explained his need to Jesus, Jesus said he would come and heal the servant. Most religious leaders of the day would not set foot in a Gentile home. They thought it would defile them, but Jesus was ready to help this Gentile seeker of truth. Then the centurion made an amazing parallel. He asked for Jesus just to speak the word and the servant would be healed. He explained that as a centurion, he is a man of authority and just has to give orders and people carry it out. The suggestion is that Jesus can do the same in the spiritual realm.

Jesus was astonished. His own people didn’t see what this Gentile understood. The Jews, who had the writings of the prophets and examples of God dealing with man, didn’t see Jesus’ authority as clearly as this Roman. Do you?

Consider: One word from Jesus and the physical world is changed forever. It is His word that sustains all things. His words created all things. His word can transform you and those you care about.

**February 16 Morning**

Exodus 28:30 *30 Also put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastpiece, so they may be over Aaron's heart whenever he enters the presence of the LORD. Thus Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the LORD.*

The LORD gave Moses detailed instructions for the Tabernacle (a mobile house of worship) and all its furniture and instruments. The priests had special clothing that they were to wear when they ministered. The High Priest had a breastpiece that had twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel. We do not know the details of the Urim and Thummim, but they are believed to be two additional stones that were used to determine the LORD’s will. Since the Spirit of God came upon people, but did not live in their hearts until Pentecost, the people needed some way to determine the LORD’s leading. Some believe that these stones would glow, one for a ‘yes’ answer, the other for a ‘no’ answer. They were worn over the high priest’s heart.

Some people today would love to have the Urim and Thummim. I often hear people say, “If God would just send me a fax, it would be so much easier.” God desires us to have an intimate relationship with Him. I’m grateful I live in a day when I do not have to consult a stone, but instead have the Spirit of God living in my heart. If I have been walking in communion with Him, the answer is always clear and very personal. I get a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ or no glow at all in my heart. No glow at all means I’m not ready to know the answer, or I’m asking the wrong question and need not worry about it now. That is the time when people would like that fax from God. But God is telling us, “Trust me! I know what is best and will tell you when you need to know.” His “not now” answer should be sufficient for us. Trust Him!

Consider: If the answer to your question is not clearly in God’s Word, God can speak to your heart, as long as you genuinely desire to know His will.

**February 16 Evening**

Matthew 8:25-27 *25 The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us!*

*We're going to drown!" 26 He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. 27 The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"*

In a recent low water level of the Kinneseret Lake, a boat dating back to the first century was found preserved in the mud. Archeologists know it was a Jewish boat from that time because there are murals remaining to this day of those boats. If this is the same kind that Jesus and His disciples were in, twelve people would have made a very full boat. There was a quarterdeck up front, under which the nets could be stored. Jesus was probably under there sleeping on the nets. He was an early riser. Before the day got going, He got His instructions and fellowship with His Father. He must have been wiped out physically to have slept through the storm.

Jesus was an all-out kind of person.

This seems like another one of Satan’s attempts to stop Jesus. Other Gospels tell us that He was on His way to the Gentile region of Decapolis. The Gospel was going to make great advances there. We can expect resistance when we are obeying the will of the Father. The Jews considered the depths of that lake to be the Abyss. To think they might drown was more than just a fear of death. They woke Jesus and pleaded for Him to save them.

Jesus first rebuked them for their lack of faith. The rebuke was not that they did not do what He was about to do, but that they feared. Faith believes that God is greater than any difficulty or situation we find ourselves in. Jesus’ chosen ones need never fear. Their Shepherd is greater than all. Then He rebuked the wind and waves, and there was a complete calm. *What kind of man is this?* What is your answer? It has a great deal to do with whether you will have fear or faith. If your answer is, “He is my Savior, Creator, Master, and friend!”, then you need never fear what comes your way.

Consider: Go ahead, ask yourself what kind of man creation obeys.

**February 17 Morning**

Exodus 28:35-37 *35 Aaron must wear it when he ministers. The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the Holy Place before the LORD and when he comes out, so that he will not die.36 "Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as on a seal: HOLY TO THE LORD.37 Fasten a blue cord to it to attach it to the turban; it is to be on the front of the turban.*

Once a year the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies with the blood of the Atonement Lamb. There he would sprinkle the blood before the Lord. Around the bottom of his robe were bells that sounded as he walked to remind him that he was ministering before a holy God who was aware of his presence. A tradition says that the other priests would tie a rope around his ankle in case they had to drag out his dead body. If the priest was not right with God or did not function according to God’s command, he might be struck dead!

On the turban and over the priest’s forehead was a gold plate that read ‘Holy to the LORD’. As the priest entered, he would be in the presence of the glowing ball of light, the Shekinah Glory, which hovered over the ark. It was a visible manifestation of the invisible God.

The great curtain that the priest went through to enter this place was torn from top to bottom when Jesus died. We now have free access to God. We do not need to fear sudden death because of our sin in the presence of a Holy God, for the atonement blood of Jesus is over us. That blood is the blood all the other sacrifices looked forward to. Our minds are dedicated to God as His instruments, and so, God sees the same golden sign over our foreheads, ‘Holy to the LORD’. We are made priests unto God (2Peter 2:5).

Meditation: God has made a way for you to come into His presence through Jesus. Enter in!

**February 17 Evening**

Matthew 9:11-13 *11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples,*

*"Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" 12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

Jesus sure broke the mold of how a rabbi should act. When Jesus called Matthew to follow him, Matthew invited all his friends to a feast. It was his chance to tell his world that he was leaving all to follow Jesus. The religious leaders saw what was going on. They despised the tax collectors because they were Jewish but worked for their oppressors, the Romans. Seeing Jesus feast with this hated segment of society, the Pharisees asked the disciples why Jesus associated with the sinners of the world. That is a subtle way of telling the disciples that they are following the wrong man.

Jesus overheard the question. His response was that the sick were the ones that needed a doctor. If you have something that will help sinners, where do you go?

The Pharisees had nothing to share but head knowledge, so they stuck together. They did not realize that they were just as needy as those tax collectors. We tend to gloss over our own sins and amplify the sins of others. Jesus had a word of instruction from the prophet Hosea for them to chew on. “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” (Hosea 6:6) Hosea had expressed God’s heart that desires us to show one another mercy. That is more important to God than doing little sacrificial things in which we deny ourselves.

Jesus ended that conversation with a word that had to stick in their minds. “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” The Pharisees considered themselves righteous, but they knew the Scripture that says, “There is none righteous, no not one.” (Psalm 14:1-3) They had to realize their real condition before they could receive His ministry.

Consider: Do we think of ourselves more highly than we should? We need the Great Physician every day. Are we making friends only with those who are like us? How will the needy ever hear the Gospel if we do not associate with them?

**February 18 Morning**

Exodus 29:37 *37 For seven days make atonement for the altar and consecrate it. Then the altar will be most holy, and whatever touches it will be holy.*

There is a principle here that Jesus referred to in the New Testament. Some things were dedicated to God in such a way that they could not be defiled from without. If someone brought an offering and placed it on the altar, and they later found the offering was defiled, there was no need to purify the altar a second time.

The altar made the gift holy.

We see that principle displayed in the life of Jesus. Whatever He touched or touched Him became whole. Normally, if a leper or person with a bleeding tumor touched someone, the person they touched would need to go through a cleansing ritual. Not so with Jesus. Instead of defiling Him the one who touched him was healed, whole. The Most Holy object purifies the defiled one.

Jesus is our altar. He is the One upon Whom we cast our lives. We place ourselves upon Him on the cross, but instead of defiling Him, we are raised with Him, whole, cleansed, and holy. The altar has sanctified the gift, for it is Most Holy. It doesn’t matter how defiled you are, if you present your body a living sacrifice upon the altar of Jesus upon the cross, you will be made holy. His holiness is more powerful than any defilement or impurity because of His blood shed in your place. Have you placed yourself upon the Most Holy Altar?

Once you have, then you are to go out into the world transformed (Romans 12:1,2) to bring that transforming touch of Jesus to all who come into your life. The holiness imparted to you will transform you, so that you are not conformed to the world around you. (Be sure and read the confirmation in the February 19th morning devotion)

Meditation: Nothing is too defiled for Jesus’ transforming touch.

**February 18 Evening**

Matthew 9:15-17 *15 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.16 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. 17Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.*

John’s disciples asked why they and the Pharisees fasted, but Jesus’ disciples didn’t. Jesus’ reply used a wedding analogy. When there is a wedding, the guests are expected to join a feast. Jesus has come to take a bride, the church. He is calling out people from the world to be His own. While He is among them, they should be rejoicing. He predicts that He will be taken away, and then they will fast.

Then He jumps to another analogy. Jesus could use analogies to say things that He could not say directly. It caused the hearers to think more deeply and not be as readily offended. The analogy of wineskins is one that we have a hard time relating to. The new skin was soft and flexible. It expanded with the wine as it fermented. After the fermentation, it began to harden into the shape it had stretched into. If you tried to reuse it for new wine, it would burst and the wine and the skin would be wasted. The Pharisees and John’s remaining disciples had conformed to the Old Covenant. The rules and structure of the Law had shaped their container. Jesus had come to establish the New Covenant. Had they tried to make the transition now, they would do distort the truth and act against their conscience.

Some of the Pharisees and John’s disciples did make the transition. They were still flexible. Their ideology had not hardened yet. For some, it was too late. They no longer had a teachable spirit, an open mind. They thought they knew the fullness of truth and would not receive anything that did not fit the hard container of their limited understanding. Stay flexible! The one way to do that is to remember the many times you have been wrong. Jesus has many things to teach us, doctrines to adjust, and attitudes to transform.

Consider: Humility is the best wineskin preservative.

**February 19 Morning**

Exodus 31:13 *13 "Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.*

The Israelites had weekly Sabbaths (a day of rest), but they also had new moon Sabbaths and other special Sabbath days related to their feasts. On those days, there were restrictions as to how much they could do and how far they could go. All these were designed to have them take time to contemplate the God they served. They were to be still for a day to focus upon God. The above verse teaches that the reason for the Sabbath was to know who the LORD is and that He is the One who makes us holy. It seems that they missed the whole point of the exercise and concentrated on the rules surrounding the Sabbath instead of the purpose. They thought that keeping the rules made them holy, when it is clearly the LORD who makes us holy.

They had the example in Abraham who was declared right with God by simply believing in God before he had done anything the Lord asked. They also had the example of the man recording this passage, Moses. He was a murderer and failed miserably when he tried to do it his own way. But when we know we can’t do it ourselves, that holiness is unattainable by our efforts, we finally look to the LORD who makes us holy. Though, at that time, they did not understand how, they simply needed to believe He would. It is the trust placed in God, not a detailed understanding of the process that makes men right with God, both then and now. He makes us holy. His work will transform our lives when our trust is placed in Him. Meditation: It is the LORD who makes you holy when your trust is in Him to do so.

**February 19 Evening**

Matthew 9:36-38 *36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

When you look at a crowd, what do you see? Jesus’ heart breaks for them, because they are so helpless. That image of sheep without a shepherd is full of implications. They don’t know where to go for food or water. There is no one to tend to wounds. The wolves come in whenever they please and devour as many as they like. We are harassed by our flesh from within, and the carnality of others from without. Then there is the Devourer. He is ready to give us whatever we lust after that will destroy us. Harassed and helpless!

Jesus used the analogy of a harvest loaded and ripe. If no one gets out there and picks it, the harvest is wasted. I have seen it happen when there is a bumper crop. The fruit is just waiting to be picked. But when you can’t find enough help, and in our world today it is hard to find laborers that will work at a wage that makes it profitable, the fruit starts to drop to the ground. Those that will work give it their all every day and go home exhausted. The autumn winds come and shake the fruit off the tree. Finally the freeze comes and destroys what is left.

If you are willing to share the heart of Jesus, what should you do? Our first thought is practical. Run out and join the laborers. But that is not what Jesus asked us to do. He requested that we ask the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His harvest field. You have to know how to pick without damaging and wasting the fruit. Running out and trying to help is not the solution. Prayer is the answer! God is training the harvesters. Pray that He will send them. God wants you to participate through prayer, by praying His will into the earth and going when He sends you.

Consider: Next time you see a crowd, what will you do?

**February 20 Morning**

Exodus 32:31-32 *31 So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold.32 But now, please forgive their sin--but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."*

While Moses was on the mountain receiving God’s instructions, the people had gone their own way, insisting that Aaron make them a god to lead them. Freed from the bondage of Egypt and now thinking they are free of a moral leader, they threw caution to the wind and gave in to their lusts. While Aaron formed a golden calf from their donated earrings, the people partied wildly.

God told Moses to get back to the people, for they had already broken the commandments He had just given. God described the people as stiff-necked. In other words, if you call to them, they will not turn their head to hear. They go their own way. God said He will destroy them and begin again with Moses’ children to make a nation for Himself, but Moses pled to God with the above prayer. Imagine if Moses had not had such a heart for the people. The nation would be called the Children of Moses, not the Children of Israel. Here we see the real heart of an intercessor. Paul the Apostle had the same burden for Israel. These men shared the heart of their LORD.

God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that we would not perish. How much are you willing to give of yourself for the lost around you? Pray for a heart for others like Moses and Paul had, and most of all, like our heavenly Father, who is not willing that any should perish.

Consider: Do we carry such a burden for those whom God has called? Would we give up our eternity to gain theirs?

**February 20 Evening**

Matthew 10:24-25, 28 *24 "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!*

*28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

If you associate yourself with Jesus, prepare your heart to be treated like Jesus was treated. They called Him Lord of the demons. That means they consider His followers to be demons. One of the repeated patterns of Satan (the accuser of the brethren) is to accuse God’s people of the very things he is guilty of. Once aware of this, you will often notice it. The unredeemed will think they are serving God when they accuse us of evil. We should walk with God in a way that would leave us above reproach, but that does not mean the enemy won’t accuse you of what he is doing. You are in good company. The saints before you experienced the same.

The Lord gave us a negative imperative in regards to the fear of men. Don’t do it! Do not fear men! All they can do is kill your body. Eternity is incomparable in length to the short life we have on earth. Fear God. Live in respectful reverence to His will. He will judge all men. Live so as to be judged innocent of treachery and rebellion. That may mean that you confront evil in your society, your church and your home. Negative consequences may result from your stand. Don’t fear man’s response. Fear disobedience to God.

The way that we conduct ourselves shows our true belief. The fear of man says we believe this world is all there is. The fear of God says we believe in eternity. Your life preaches one message or the other. Those who really believe in a sovereign eternal God, can face anything man can throw at them. They have a holy boldness that shows their eyes are fixed on eternal realities. They see past the present adversity to the glory yet to be revealed. They are partakers of the sufferings of Christ.

Consider Eternity!

**February 21 Morning**

Exodus 33:13-15 *13 If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people."14 The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." 15 Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.*

Moses had set up a tent where he would go and meet with the Lord. The cloud that led them would come over the tent when Moses went to commune with God. He had a special place he would go. It is a good example for us. We should commune with God throughout the day, but a special place to really hear from God can be helpful.

After Moses saw the devastation that sin brought on the camp and was reminded about the fallen nature of man, he asked God to teach him His ways so that he would stay in God’s favor. Moses was asking to learn to walk in righteousness. He wanted to forsake the ways of man and live in the ways of God, that he might please God. How can he lead if he does not know God’s ways? His reminder that the nation is God’s people enforces the need to know God’s ways. He had already received the Law, but Moses knew it was more than just rules for living.

Instead of giving Moses more rules or a book to study called *The Ways of God*, He gave Himself. Presence is rightly capitalized here. This is the Prince of the Countenance. It is Jesus going with Moses. That is who is in the cloud as the angel of the Lord. He is the One who meets with Moses in the tent. He is the Way of God.

Moses rightly says, “If your Presence does not go with us we don’t want to move.”

I hope you have come to the same conclusion. Sin is devastating. We need to know the ways of God. We need His Presence with us in all we do and everywhere we go.

Consider: If Jesus doesn’t go with you, stay put! In Him we find rest.

**February 21 Evening**

Matthew 10:37-39 *37 "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

The word of God tells us to love one another. It also tells us to honor our father and mother. What is Jesus saying here? Our mother and father and children and even our very life are all gifts from God. Our primary love and allegiance is to the Giver of all good things. If we love what He has given us, more than the One that gave it, we have entered into the realm of idolatry. This all surpassing love can only come through a revelation of His great love for us. Love produces love.

Jesus goes on to say that if we do not take up our cross and follow, we are not worthy of Him. When a criminal was sentenced to crucifixion, the judge ordered the cross beam to be secured to the victim’s arms and back. He had to carry it to his place of execution. Once that beam was on your back, you were as good as dead. He then followed the soldiers to the place of execution. Do you see the implications when Jesus said, “Take up your cross and follow me”? We must ask ourselves whether or not we have that mind set. Is your life over and His life in you begun, or do you still go where you please?

If you find your life you will lose it. If we go where we please and find satisfaction in things of the world, our life will be lost. That is Jesus’ explanation of reality. The only way to really find life is to lose it for Jesus’ sake. The listeners had not yet seen the final display of His love for them. Perhaps it was His compassion and the miracles that helped them look beyond themselves. We can look at His display of love on the cross and see that He was literally willing to do that for us.

Consider: Should we respond with any less willingness to do so for Him?

**February 22 Morning**

Exodus 33:18-19 *18 Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." 19 And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*

Once Moses was promised that the Presence of God would be with Him, he asked to see the glory of God. The LORD placed him in a cleft of a rock and covered him with his hand and let Moses glance at what was referred to as “God’s backside.”

Just what did Moses see? God is invisible, for He is a Spirit. The manifest

Presence of God is Jesus. (Col 1:15) But why all the caution and protection to see Jesus? He was in His normal state, as opposed to His earthly condition. His normal state is to be clothed in glory. A glance at the brilliance of that glory was enough to make Moses’ face to glow with the after effects of that radiance. After catching that glimpse of Jesus in His glory, he had to put a veil over his face so the people could talk with him.

Observe what God called His glory. He said, *"I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you…”.* It was the goodness of God that Moses viewed. Certainly Jesus is the goodness of God toward us. It is as if goodness and glory are synonymous. Now consider the fact that the glory of God is in all the earth. (Isa 6:3) We could say that His goodness is in all the earth.

Is there a place where the Lord Jesus is not working? Is there any corner of the globe where mercy is not reaching out? We do live in a fallen world, but the wonder is that the goodness of God is at work in every corner of it. Some choose to see only the darkness. Others have eyes to see the goodness of God in all His various ministries, everywhere they go. You can tell who those people are. Their faces glow.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see your glory and goodness that my face might reflect You.

**February 22 Evening**

Matthew 11:12-14 *12 From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14 And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.*

John the Baptist came preaching repentance. Though he was the last to hold the Old Testament office of prophet, his message was not about the Law. It was about the coming kingdom of heaven. *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* Crowds were drawn to the wilderness to hear John speak and be baptized by him.

Their hearts were becoming a level highway for Christ to enter in. Even though the Spirit was forcefully moving people, they had to be willing to buck centuries of tradition and thought patterns to hear and receive the Gospel.

The Prophets and the Law pointed to the coming Messiah. The Jews believed that Elijah would return to prepare the way of the Messiah. Jesus was telling them that Elijah had come, in John the Baptist. John was the one that prepared the way for the Messiah. All history pointed to the moment in time in which they lived. The revelation of God to man was climaxing in that day. No wonder Jesus said the kingdom of heaven was forcefully advancing since John began his ministry. This was it! But it continues its advance.

After Jesus ascension, the Spirit was poured out upon men and women. The kingdom of heaven continues to forcefully advance. Have you forcefully laid hold of it? It takes an effort to break the traditions and thought patterns of man and let Christ be formed in you. Forcefully lay hold of the kingdom in all your ways. Don’t allow the world to hold you back! Lay hold of the kingdom of heaven.

Remember: Let the King reign in your heart today and every day forward!

**February 23 Morning**

Exodus 34:14 *14 Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.*

We run into trouble when we think of God as we would think of man. That is all we have to relate to, other humans. With the exception of Jesus’ physical life, all human comparisons with God’s character are flawed. When we read this passage, at first, we may think of jealousy is an unholy quality. That would be thinking as if God was like man. He is not. He is utterly holy. We can understand Him calling Himself a jealous God if we consider His other attributes.

His jealousy is out of a holy heart of real love. Since we are dedicated to Him as His bride, He longs to see us uncompromisingly dedicated to Him. His desires are entirely pure and unselfish. The motivation of His jealousy is His genuine love that knows His ways are best for us. He wants to see us made into a pure and spotless bride.

The same word for jealous in Hebrew can be translated zealous. God has a great zeal to see us transformed into the image of Christ. It is out of His great love that we see this jealousy, or zealousness, in God. It is hard to fathom that Someone so great could love us so much. We, in proper response, should allow our love for Him to flourish. We should be zealous about Him as well. We should also be sensitive to any time something may be competing for our love for Him. It is not a good idea to arouse His jealousy. It is there for our good.

Meditate on the zealous love of God for you. Is there something that is competing for your love for Him?

**February 23 Evening**

Matthew 11:28-30 *28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

Has life worn you out? Tired of trying to get it all done? Tired of trying to please God, feed your family, help a friend, and take care of the million little demanding details that life can be full of? Go to Jesus! He will give you rest. Take His yoke upon you and learn from Him.

Yokes are usually for a tandem pair of oxen. Younger oxen would often plow with the older experienced ones. Imagine yoking up with Jesus. Talk about experience! He went through it all without sin. He can teach you how to plow through life. Yoked to Him, you will learn from Him. He is gentle and humble in heart. No better qualities could you find in a teacher. He won’t get on your case because you didn’t get it right the first time. He gently instructs and directs. Learning from Him is a place of rest for your soul. That means your thoughts, emotions, and impending decisions can all rest in His perfect instruction.

Yoked together with Jesus you will see that God has it all under control. He teaches us to trust in the Father and act at His leading. When we do that, everything comes out best in the long run. We can trust in His wonderful knowledge about all things and His power to do anything. That makes the yoke feel light and the load we pull easy. He plowed this path before us and broke up the soil we could never have pulled the plow through. Now we pull the plow through the furrow that He already plowed for us. Just stay in the yoke with Him. Don’t go trying to plow another field in another yoke. You’ll find that without Him, you can do nothing. The yoke will be unbearably heavy and the burden unmovable. Which yoke are you under? Which burden are you pulling?

Consider: If the yoke is unbearably heavy, it must not be Jesus’ yoke.

**February 24 Morning**

Exodus 40:34-35 *34 Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.35 Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.*

Once the tabernacle was set up according to the instructions Moses received on the mountain, the cloud that had been leading them settled upon it. The glory of the LORD so filled the Tent of Meeting that he could not enter.

Today the tent of meeting is your spirit. God desires to so fill you that your life is overflowing with Him, and little room is left for self to enter in. That is complete Christ likeness. He is taking us all to that place, individually and corporately. One day the work will be done and everything in place, and the glory of the LORD will completely fill us, the tabernacles, and the Tabernacle. He has always been in the process of making a dwelling place for Himself.

The day of completion is the wedding feast of the Lamb. When we see Him we will be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1John 3:1-2). When we are like Him, He can fill us completely. We have a deposit now, a deposit of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). That is deposit of what will someday be in all His fullness.

We experience it more and more as we grow in Him.

“Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool; what house will you build me?” says the Lord, “and what shall be the place of my rest?” (Acts 7:49)“ Upon this rock I will build my church…”(Matthew 16:18) They that believe have entered into rest (Hebrews 4:3a).

Meditation: I am the temple of the living God!

**February 24 Evening**

Matthew 12:32-34 *32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. 33 "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.*

Jesus had just restored a man’s withered hand on the Sabbath. The people were in awe and wondered if Jesus was “the Son of David”. That was a reference to the promise of God that the son of David would reign forever. The religious leaders said it was because the Prince of demons helped him.

Jesus was walking in the power and direction of the Holy Spirit. His words were from God. He did nothing on His own. He said if someone speaks against me, it will be forgiven, but you will never be forgiven for speaking against the Holy Spirit. He referred again to fruit as the distinguishing characteristic of the tree. Jesus can’t go about constantly doing good by the power of the Prince of demons. A person who demonstrates the power of the Holy Spirit, doing good and speaking truth, is connected to the source of goodness. Condemn his works and you are condemning the goodness of God demonstrated by the working of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus pulled no punches in telling them that they were bad trees. He called them a swarm of baby snakes. Their words confuse and distort what is real, causing the seeking soul to be led astray. That is what was in their hearts. Have you paid attention to the words that come from your lips? Are they honest, loving, truthful, in line with God’s word and His Spirit? Do they direct people to Jesus or away from Him? Do they nurture the seeking soul or pull the seeker to someone other than Christ? If your words trouble you, check your heart condition. Fill it with the Word of God and a desire to yield to the Holy Spirit. Then our mouths will overflow with goodness.

Consider: Your heart is the well, and your mouth is the bucket.

**February 25 Morning**

Leviticus 6:9, 12-13 *9 "Give Aaron and his sons this command: 'These are the regulations for the burnt offering: The burnt offering is to remain on the altar hearth throughout the night, till morning, and the fire must be kept burning on the altar.*

*12 The fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must not go out. Every morning the priest is to add firewood and arrange the burnt offering on the fire and burn the fat of the fellowship offerings on it.13 The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out.*

Exodus 29:39f God lit the fire. We must guard that flame carefully and tend it well. Keep it on the altar. It is for God that it burns. Don't be zealous for any other thing. God has a flame in His heart for us, the same one that took Jesus to the cross.

To not have one for Him in our heart is the height of ingratitude and selfishness.

The sacrifice was performed both morning and evening. It remained on the altar through the night. We should send up our prayer sacrifice at least this often and always be a living sacrifice. Ex 39:42 *"There I will meet you and speak with you."*

Three times in five verses we are told to keep the fire burning. The spiritual picture is clear. You probably remember the children’s song, “Don’t let Satan blow it out, I’m gonna let it shine. Let is shine, let it shine, all the time.” I bet you didn’t realize that song goes all the way back to Leviticus. If the fire goes out, the one that God lit, there is always the temptation for man to relight it. We need the fire of God in our sacrifice, not the fire of man. Man’s fire is zealous but ends up glorifying man and not God. The altar of our hearts should always be prepared for sacrifice on the flame that God lit in us.

Meditation: Is the fire on the altar of my heart burning with God’s fire?

**February 25 Evening**

Matthew 12:48-50 *48 He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" 49 Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*

The Gospel account rarely mentions the family of Jesus after he visited Samaria. After the resurrection there was a change, but during His ministry they did not follow Him. This is the rare exception. Jesus must have been speaking to a packed crowd in a building. His family sent word in that they wanted to speak to Him.

Jesus response was not a rejection of his family. He was teaching a deep truth.

Family that matters most are those that do the will of the Father in heaven.

We don’t seem to grasp the fullness of that truth today. Our assemblies are more like a place where we get together with like-minded friends than family. There are many exceptions. Small groups tend to grow more family minded. If you are not in a small group of around a dozen, seek one out. Take time in those groups to pray for one another’s concerns. Encourage one another to do the will of the Father even when the price is high. Then stand by and support one another.

Do you consider those who do the will of the Father your mother and brother and sister? It is not that they profess the same mindset, or conform to the same style, or are in the same social class. The unity is built around obedience to God. In that, you share the same Spirit. You share the same experience of walking by faith and not by sight. You share the same struggle with the rejection and misunderstanding of men. You don’t even need to share the same culture or language. It is the same love that beats within your heart. You have the same Father and the same desire to please Him, therefore you are brothers, forever!

Consider: Do you have a spiritual family?

**February 26 Morning**

Leviticus 17:11 *11 For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.*

Blood brings life giving oxygen and nutrients to every cell in our bodies. It carries away the waste from every cell. Without this wonderful process of both bringing nutrition and carrying away waste, we quickly die. Our brains cease to function after only a short time without sufficient blood flow. Truly, blood is our physical life.

God told Moses that the reason He designed us this way was so that the blood could make atonement for us on the altar. It makes atonement or covering for our sins. As the priest would slay the once- a- year atonement sacrifice, he would gather the blood to sprinkle before the Ark of the Covenant where God’s presence was manifest. The blood brings life, and the blood takes away impurity.

Man’s rebellion against God is so serious that only death is a sufficient penalty. Since life is in the blood, blood must be spilled as justice. From the foundation of the earth, God determined that it would be the blood of His own Son. That was the only blood that could take away the impurity of the world. All other blood was insufficient to remove sin. Each person had their own sin that needed to be removed. The blood of animals was merely a picture of what was needed, until the sufficient blood was shed, the blood acceptable to God for the sins of the world.

Thank God today that He made a way to do what we could never do. Without the blood of Jesus there would be no hope for the removal of the impurities of our soul. Like a person with liver failure, you would have died on your own poisons. But the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sins.

Pray: Thank Him for the wonder that took place upon the cross.

**February 26 Evening**

Matthew 13:13-15 *13 This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. 14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. 15 For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'*

The disciples couldn’t understand why Jesus spoke in parables. The natural man would think that a smooth compelling message would draw more people to the cause. Jesus was after more than numbers. He was seeking to draw people into a kingdom. This required a heart change, not merely a convinced mind. People will follow the intelligent speaker because of his ability to persuade. Then someone a little more persuasive comes along and they follow him. Jesus was after hearts.

Parables had to be interpreted by the Holy Spirit. A heart that knew it was helpless would seek to understand and the Holy Spirit would help them find. Revelation brings transformation. There is a personal interaction with the Holy Spirit. It has nothing to do with the persuasion of men, but everything to do with the power of interaction with God. This will never happen if the heart is calloused.

There must be the recognition of need.

If Jesus had spoken plainly, the hardhearted in the crowds would be even more accountable on the Day of Judgment. It is the grace of God that Jesus spoke in parables, that the hungry might find a personal interaction with the Holy Spirit, and that the calloused in heart might not have increased condemnation. He is speaking in parables today, too. Your days are filled with them. Do you have eyes to see? Are your ears hearing? It all depends on the condition of your heart. We can all ask for the mercy and grace of God to soften our hearts so that they will be sensitive to what He is speaking to us.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see how much I need You. Soften my heart that I might receive what you are saying to me.

**February 27 Morning**

Leviticus 19:2 *2 "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.*

Holy: unmixed, pure, undefiled, set apart for one use, not for common usage. All these terms are used for the word “holy.” Of all God’s attributes, this is the one that seems to draw from creation the most reverential awe. The special beings of praise fly around the throne singing, “Holy, holy, holy!” As they do, all those around the throne, men and angels, join with them, in awe of His holiness.

What is God commanding us to be? Fallen man is so polluted with desire for the temporal and self-appeasing pleasures. God is telling everyone that this is not His plan for man. God wants to commune with us and the Holy will not commune with the vile. There must be a change so that we can enter into that relationship God desires to have with us. All the rituals in Leviticus are painting pictures of how God will one day bring it about through the sacrifice of His only Son.

The reason that we are to be holy is so that we can come into communion with Him. But that is not the only reason. The main reason is the one stated here, “…because I, the LORD your God, am holy.” A thing is right or wrong because it is consistent or inconsistent with the perfection of God. All that is good is truly good because it is like the goodness of God. All that is genuine love is like the love of God, who is pure and perfect Love. You should be gracious toward others in the same way God is gracious toward you. The same is true of all His attributes. You, as His people, are expected to reflect His character, including His holiness. Be holy BECAUSE He is holy.

Meditation: Is there something in my life that is impure?

**February 27 Evening**

Matthew 13:22-23 *22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. 23 But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."*

Perhaps the most famous of all of Jesus’ parables is the parable of the sower. The seed was illustrative of the word of God. It was sown on a path, rocky ground, weed filled ground, and good soil. The seed on the hard path was eaten by birds. That which grew in the rocks withered from heat, because the roots were shallow. The seed that grew with the weeds bore no fruit because of the choking power of the weeds. The seed in the good ground multiplied from 30 to 100 times the amount of seed.

The soil is a picture of man’s heart. The hardhearted never allow the Word to take root. The stony heart does not let the roots grow deep. When difficulty comes, they forsake the Word. We are focusing on the seed among the weeds. Jesus said the weeds are worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth. Some hearts will never allow their trust for daily needs to be placed in the Father’s hands. They think their own hard work and planning is the way they survive. The fear of lack drives them to concentrate on gaining wealth. Jesus called wealth deceitful. It promises satisfaction and provision, but it can do neither. It can fly away with one little monetary crisis. Today’s hot investment is tomorrow’s big loser. If your heart is set on these things, you will not bear fruit. In a weedy field, the weeds suck the nutrient from the soil. That keeps the stalk of grain from having sufficient nutrients to form the grain heads.

The good soil produces many times over what was originally sown. Is the word of God multiplied in your life? Are you giving the Word out because of the increase the Word has produced in the good soil of your heart? If not, examine what kind of soil your heart is. The Lord is waiting to change the condition of that soil if you will ask Him.

Consider: Let the word of God dwell in you richly! Col 3:16a

**February 28 Morning**

Leviticus 19:18 *18 "'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.*

*Love…keeps no record of wrongs.* 1Corinthians 13:4 Jesus said that this was one of the Laws that summed up all the others (Matthew 22:39,40). I’ll bet when you read that verse, the ‘bear a grudge’ part pricked your heart, or at least provoked a memory. We seem so ready to be offended in this day and age. Jesus warned us that this would be true (Matthew 24:12).

We have lauded self-esteem but forgotten to warn of pride. Pride sets itself above others and demands that others give us respect and honor. If we hear a word spoken against us, we readily forget all the words we have spoken against others and excommunicate that person from our love and grace. In the worst cases, we play the offense over and over in our minds until it festers and becomes an infection in our memories. Just to touch on it brings pain.

Believe it or not, the cause of all that is self, not the one who offended you. If we esteem others better than ourselves, we will examine their words to see if there is truth in them. If there is, we will apologize and adjust our life. If there is not, we will give those words to God and go on loving that person. How many times have we offended God? Does He harbor each offense and bring them up to you every time you want to pray? Jesus said (paraphrase) that God will treat you as you treat others. It sounds like we better be very generous in our forgiveness!

Meditation: Who do I need to forgive and resume loving?

**February 28 Evening**

Matthew 13:28-30 *28 "'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' 29 "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"*

Jesus shared a parable about a wheat field in which weeds were discovered. The owner of the field knew that an enemy had sown the weed seeds. Those who worked the field asked if they should pull the weeds up. The owner was concerned that the wheat would be damaged in the process, so he told them to wait until the harvest. Then they would be able to separate the good from the bad.

This is one of the parables that Jesus later explained. We know exactly what He meant. The field is the world. The wheat are the children of God. The weeds are the children of the evil one. To pull out the wicked now would damage the wheat. We are to grow together until the harvest. The angels will separate the good from the bad. Jesus said that the angels will not only root out those who do evil, but everything that causes evil. That is a wonderful promise! The good will shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father.

Sometimes we wonder why God does not strike the evil down now. He has given us the reason in this parable. Ancient farming was not done in rows. Walking into that field would cause some wheat to be damaged. Pulling up the roots of the weeds would damage roots of the wheat. God knows we need the testing and trials that the wicked bring our way. Those trials teach us patience, compassion, and most of all, cause us to trust in the sovereignty of God. Our natural mind thinks that we would do so much better if they were removed. Trust God to use those that trouble your life to draw you to Him. Know that they are not removed for a reason.

Remember: Your Father knows best.

**February 29 Morning**

Leviticus 26:40-42 *40 "'But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers--their treachery against me and their hostility toward me,41 which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies--then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin,42 I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.*

What was left of the nation of Israel went into captivity one thousand years later just as the LORD promised. They were unfaithful to be the examples to the world that God had called them to be. Instead, they worshipped the gods of the people around them and perverted justice. Treachery and hostility toward God sounds so evil, but it is accurate. In great patience, God endured this attitude and sent them prophet after prophet, most of whom they murdered. Finally, when they had gone too far, God used one of their enemies to conquer them.

As captives in Babylon, they remembered these words and began to confess their sins and the sins of their fathers. They began to sensitize (circumcise) their hearts to God. They humbled themselves and recognized that they were the ones that were wrong and more than deserving of what they had received at God’s hand. For 70 years they were captives in a strange land, and without a temple. God saw their repentant hearts, now sensitive and not hardened toward Him, and restored them just as He promised. He never forgets His promises.

God does the same with us today. When our hearts are hard, we may find ourselves in captivity of one kind or another. Things beyond our control cause us grief and pain until we do what they did, sensitize our hearts and humble ourselves. God knows that He is our greatest need, and He will take us through whatever we need to go through to bring us to Himself.

Meditation: Is my heart sensitive and humble toward God?

**February 29 Evening**

Matthew 13:44-46 *44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.*

Jesus spoke in terms of 100%. That was nothing new to the Jews. One of their favorite passages was to love the Lord with ALL the heart, soul, mind and strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) The things we become familiar with seem to lose their power of influence over us. It is as if our heart becomes calloused to the depth of meaning in those words. We rattle it off without even thinking about it. Jesus rephrased it in a parable to help them become re-sensitized to it. He compared it to a treasure. It was a common thing in that era for people to bury their treasure for safekeeping. Sometimes a person would die and his treasure would never be found. The man in the parable stumbled across a lost treasure. If he purchased the field, the treasure would legally be his. You have stumbled across a treasure, too. The Holy Spirit had a great deal to do with your stumbling, but you have found it nevertheless.

The problem with this treasure is that it comes with the Lordship of Jesus in your life. In other words, you can’t just take it without cost. Yes, salvation is free because the Father paid your debt through the Son. Jesus is referring to living in the kingdom of heaven. That is to have Christ as your king. He cannot be your king unless you make yourself His obedient subject. Do you see the great value, both now and through eternity, of giving up everything else for the blessedness of living in the kingdom? This is discipleship! Jesus told His disciples that unless they gave up everything, they could not be His disciples. (Luke 14:33) You cannot really be a learner of the life of Jesus when other things come first.

Consider: Living in the kingdom begins when you see He is the treasure of all treasures and nothing else is worth a distant second in your heart. Have you seen Him?

**March 1 Morning**

Numbers 6:24-26 ***24*** *"' "The LORD bless you and keep you;****25*** *the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;****26*** *the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."'*

What an awesome blessing prescribed by the Lord Himself. This is His desire for His people. He wants to bless us! To the Hebrew, this blessing meant having every good thing in every way both physical and spiritual. It meant one would be happy knowing he had all he needed. (Phil 4:19)

“Keep you” means to protect physically and spiritually. What good is being blessed if we are not kept in that way? “Make His face shine upon you” is to be pleased with you, to show you kindness. His eye is upon your circumstances. His ear is open to your prayer. His mouth is speaking to your situation. “Be gracious to you”, we have learned from Christ how greatly we need the grace of God. How willing He is to show us that grace! It is grace that makes the rest of the blessing possible. “Turn his face toward you”, to see your need, hear your prayer, be mindful of you. Is your face toward Him? “And give you peace”, (shalom) to be in harmony with the will of God. It is to be in step with your created purpose, to have peace with God through the blood of Jesus. The opposite of peace is to be in turmoil and war within and without. God's desire for us is peace, and so He sent us the Prince of Peace.

This is the blessing the priests were to pronounce over the people of God. It is as good for us today as it was for them 3500 years ago. Man has changed his world, but his heart has the same needs. Let the LORD, Himself, speak this blessing upon you and your family.

Meditation: As priest of your household, pronounce this blessing over your family.

**March 1 Evening**

Matthew 13:56-58 *56 Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" 57 And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor." 58 And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.*

At first, Jesus’ hometown folk were impressed with Him. When they figured out what He was saying, they looked for reasons to be upset with Him. A person that does not like the message will soon accept a critical spirit and begin to find fault in the messenger. The Greek word for ‘offense’ is *skandalizo* which comes from the noun *skandalon.* *Skandalon* is the word used for the trigger of a trap. It is the lever that causes the trap to spring shut. When we look for faults in others, we are searching for something to grab hold of for accusation. The accuser of the brethren is Satan. We don’t realize that when we seize that trigger, the trap closes in on our mind. From that time forward all that person’s perfections appear in our mind as flawed. We assign motives that were never in that person’s mind, thinking we are more spiritual. Remember, the unredeemed find fault in the church every day. It is not a sign of spirituality, but of immaturity.

Those hometown folk that were with Jesus did not accept the call on His life, even as He read it from the Word of God. “How could this man be the one Isaiah wrote of? We know His sisters! He didn’t study under a great rabbi! How dare He claim a relationship with God that is greater than ours and instruct us!” When Jesus shared that His message would go to the Gentiles and reminded them of examples of the same in their own Bible, they tried to kill Him. It is sad that He could not do miracles there because of their refusal to believe and have faith. The trap they had sprung on themselves not only kept the miraculous from blessing the city, but it prevented them and those they influenced from entering the kingdom of heaven. The very people Jesus had grown up among, as a living example of a holy child, teen and young adult, refused the salvation they had been waiting for.

Don’t reach for that trigger! If you already have, repent! God can free you from the trap, if you will confess your sin. The revelation of an error in another is the call to intercede, not build a condemning faction around. Is that how you would like

Jesus to treat you? (Ephesians 4:32; Matthew 6:14,15)

Warning: Don’t let a critical spirit enslave your thought life. Always look for the good, not the fault. (Romans 12:21)

**March 2 Morning**

Numbers 11:4-6 *4 The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost--also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic.6 But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"*

They started wailing again. It’s easy to join a pity party. The rabble and troublemakers are always among us. They point people toward the temporal and not to Jesus, the eternal. They point to the things that you do not currently possess and not to the blessings at hand. They crave the things of the world and not the things of God.

Did the manna cost? Here they are with miraculous provision and they are whining for something more exotic. It would be hard to have the same meal day after day, and a miracle loses its awe to us when we see it daily. How we remember the good but not the bad! Their babies were fed to the crocs and their backs to the whips, but they want to go back for a nice dinner.

The real problem is that they are not hungry for God. Jesus said that He is the manna that comes down from heaven. They are tired of focusing on one thing. They’d like a little worldly diversion. It shows they had not grown spiritually, and though they were out of Egypt, Egypt was not out of them. Watch out for the allurement of the world. It promises its delicacies but neglects to tell you of the price you will pay for them or how temporal their satisfaction is. The Promised Land has plenty to satisfy, but you must be prepared by learning to put first things first. Which will it be for you, forward, or backward?

Prayer: Lord, keep my heart satisfied with You, the true bread from heaven.

**March 2 Evening**

Matthew 14:16-18 *16 Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." 17 "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. 18 "Bring them here to me," he said.*

Jesus and the disciples tried to escape the crowds to get some rest, but the crowds found them. Jesus healed all the sick that were brought to Him. He was concerned about their need to eat. Jesus is concerned about our daily necessities.

First He challenged His disciples to feed them. He was pointing out man’s inability. In the Gospel of John, Philip calculated what it would cost eight months wages to feed the crowd. There were 5000 men plus women and children. A little boy brought five loaves and two fish to the disciples. They expressed to Jesus how short their supply was. Then Jesus tells us how to deal with our inadequacy. “Bring them here to me,” He said. What little we place in Jesus’ hands can be multiplied by His divine power. It is good for us to recognize how inadequate we are and how all sufficient He is.

Not only did everyone have enough to eat, but there were 12 baskets full left over. There is an Old Testament precedent for this miracle in 2 Kings 4:42-44. This crowd was Jewish. There were originally twelve Jewish tribes. The 12 baskets could represent supply for all of Israel. The next time that Jesus performs this miracle there will be 4000 Gentiles with 7 baskets full left over. Some scholars believe that those 7 baskets represent the seven Gentile nations, or we could see it as the number of perfection, meeting the needs of the entire world (Mark 8:19-21). Jew or Gentile, Jesus is more than enough for all our needs.

Remember: Just bring what He has given you, and place it in His hands. He will multiply it to meet the need.

**March 3 Morning**

Numbers 11:14, 16-17 *14 I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me…*

*16 The LORD said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. 17 I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.*

There is only one man that is meant to be the leader that all look to, Jesus of Nazareth. God brought Moses to the place where he recognized that carrying the burden of all the people was not meant for an under-shepherd. Jesus is the Great Shepherd, and He employs many under-shepherds. Even when we cast it upon the Lord, it can just get to be too much for us to deal with. We were meant to share the load with our brothers and sisters in the faith. As we gather with them, God places His Spirit upon them (now within them) so they can be His instruments. They help God ordained leadership carry the burden of the people.

When we try to carry it alone we find ourselves facing depression as Moses was here. He asked the Lord to put him to death. All the complaining just became overwhelming. But when we stand together with a team filled with the Spirit, we share the load and build one another up. Each finds his place of ministry and we work together as God intended.

Jethro had given Moses this advice earlier, but what was lacking? The elders needed the Spirit to truly be able to carry Moses burden for the people. A worker can do physical activities and make decisions, but a Spirit filled worker helps to carry the burden for the people.

Meditation: Do I rely on the Spirit to help me carry the load in the fellowship I attend?

**March 3 Evening**

Matthew 14:31-33 *31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" 32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

Jesus sent the disciples ahead while He went up into the mountain to pray. They rowed against a wind that kept them from getting across the lake. During the few remaining hours before dawn, Jesus came to them walking on the water. Jews called the depths of the lake “the Abyss.” Seeing a man walking on the water frightened them, but Jesus told them who He was and that they need not fear. (Job 9:8)

Peter asked to come to Jesus on the water. Jesus invited him to come. That first step off the boat was quite a step of faith. Remember, the wind is blowing and the waves are rolling by. Do you step on the top of wave, or jump to a low point? Peter actually took a few steps but then got his eyes off Jesus and onto the waves and started to sink. He cried out to the Lord, and the Lord grabbed his hand and rebuked his doubt. As soon as they were both in the boat, the wind died down and the disciples began to worship Jesus.

Every storm in life is a test to see if we will walk through it by faith or doubt. Sinking into that lake was the last thing Peter wanted to experience, yet the distraction of the physical caused him to experience what he dreaded most. Even then, in the midst of doubt, you can call out to the Lord and immediately His hand is there. We rarely walk straight across our storms without being distracted. Why do we doubt? Why don’t we have more faith in what the Lord can do? It depends on where our vision is fixed. What are we giving the most attention to? It helps to realize that the Lord has allowed the storm so that our faith might be increased. Whether we pass or fail, when we end up in the boat together and the wind dies down, we end up worshipping Him. We see His might and ability a little more clearly and worship Him for who He is. “Truly you are the Son of God!”

Consider: Difficulty is often the path to spiritual growth.

**March 4 Morning**

Numbers 11:21-23 *21 But Moses said, "Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, 'I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!' 22 Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?" 23 The LORD answered Moses, "Is the Lord's arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you."*

The people were whining about not having meat to eat. Moses was very discouraged. God promised meat for a month along with some valuable lessons. Moses just couldn’t see that it was possible. He looked out over the camp and couldn’t imagine how God could do it. His response to God was an exaggeration. Certainly all the fish in the sea could have fed them. Even the flocks they drove before them could have fed them. When we are discouraged, even the practical looks impossible.

God’s response is worth memorizing and keeping at hand when you think He has promised more than can be delivered. Has the omnipotent God lost some of His power? Can’t the One who created the world and everything in it provide anything at anytime He chooses? Is any thing out of His reach? Don’t limit the Eternal One! He can do whatever He says He will do in keeping with His perfect character.

This was going to be a lesson for Moses and for you and me. You and I have seen what God can do when we read these true stories. We have seen what He has done in the lives of people we know and in our own lives. We have seen that God can do what we considered impossible. Never doubt God’s capability to do what He has promised. He is able! You have seen it. You will see it again. Trust Him, and climb out of your pit of doubt up into the sunlight of faith.

Meditation: Do I truly consider God capable of doing anything in keeping with His character?

**March 4 Evening**

Matthew 15:7-9 *7 You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 8 "'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. 9 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'"*

The faultfinding religious leaders of Jesus’ day criticized the fact that Jesus’ disciples did not wash their hands before they ate. Jesus did not answer their accusation but gave them a question as a reply. He asked why they nullified the commands of God because of their traditions and cited several examples. They were looking for something to accuse Jesus and His disciples of when they were the ones who were abusing the Word of God. They said all the right things in a religious way, but their hearts were not close to God. They used religion for power, prestige, and pride. They had put traditions of men above the Word of God.

The religious organizations of man are filled with traditions and teachings of men. Anyone of us can lose our proper focus and enter into this critical spirit, condemning others for not following man’s ways when it is we who are not following God’s Word. When we do that, Jesus said we are worshipping in vain. There is no value or substance to what we are doing. We are working with the accuser of the brethren. It should put the fear of God in us to realize that these leaders thought they were serving God and really worshiping Him.

Let us ask ourselves whether our issues are issues of man or of God. Spiritual maturity is shown by what we do with a fault we see. Do we intercede for that person, and trust the Lord to show us ways to encourage them to see the light of the Word, or do we tell others of the fault we see, spreading our critical spirit like a cancer. This divisive faultfinding spirit has stopped more churches in their forward progress than sexual immorality or misuse of church funds. The flesh readily receives slander, but the Spirit builds up the body.

Warning: Let us all guard our hearts and our mouths lest we be found to be worshiping in vain.

**March 5 Morning**

Numbers 11:27-29 *27 A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." 28 Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" 29 But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"*

When Moses was too burdened with caring for all the people, the LORD had him bring all the elders together and put His Spirit on them. They all began to prophesy. Two men who were not called were out in the camp, and they were prophesying also. Moses’ general, Joshua, insisted they be stopped. Moses answer shows us the heart of a genuine God inspired leader.

*"Are you jealous for my sake?”* “What are you saying Joshua? Do you think I should be jealous that they too have been given the Spirit? Do you want everyone to look to me? Do you think God should work only within the confines of our choices (in recognizing who is an elder)?” Moses never wanted to be the number one man. His mistakes and years of humbly shepherding sheep had taught him who he was. Do you know who you are? Once we see the depravity of the human condition we will desire everyone be full of the Holy Spirit to help us. It is not a competition! We are working together to see people choose the Kingdom of Light.

Leadership positions often foster rivalries. That is the petty jealousies of men. It is blindness to the Kingdom perspective and focused on the success of an individual. People today say the same thing as Joshua when people in the congregation are anointed to serve. A person who is not an official elder, but one in heart, will teach from the Word. That is how we recognize they are, an elder. The life comes before the title. Eldad and Medad were not officially recognized by anyone but God. Encourage the expression of the gifts in everyone. Recognize God’s choices. Quench not the Spirit.

Meditation: Am I jealous for my leadership or for God’s kingdom?

**March 5 Evening**

Matthew 15:26-28 *26 He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." 27 "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.*

After Jesus gave the crowds some hard sayings, only the disciples remained (John 6:66-68). Jesus then journeyed outside the region He regularly taught in. He led the twelve to Tyre and Sidon. There were communities of Jews there, but we have no record of any teaching or interaction except this one story. A Canaanite woman came to Jesus to plead for her daughter’s healing. She must have heard stories of His work on the shores of Galilee. She pleaded for mercy, but Jesus told her He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As she continued to plead, Jesus gave her a very hard saying.  *"It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."*

Let us put this into some perspective to see if we can read between the lines. Jesus already had gone to Samaria. They were not considered Jews by the Jewish standard, yet Jesus ministered to them. They declared Him to be the Savior of the world. Jesus was thrown out of His hometown for reminding them that prophets were often sent outside Israel to Gentile people. In the story following our text, Jesus went to the region of Greek cities and fed the 4000. (Mark 7:31-8:9) Yet, He told the disciples to go only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel (Matthew 10:5).

It seems that there was a turning point here in the ministry of Jesus. He knew it was coming, for He knew the prophecies (Isaiah 11:10; 42:6). It was God’s plan to offer salvation to the Jews first. The Apostle Paul follows the same pattern in His ministry (Acts 13:46-48). This Gentile woman’s response was filled with faith.

Compare that to the Jews response to Jesus’ hard saying to them (John 6:52,66). Jesus often comes to us with a hard saying to test and strengthen our faith. Jesus’ saying actually drew her closer instead of driving her away.

Consider: When Jesus speaks a difficult expression to you, will you respond like the Gentile mother or the Jewish crowds?

**March 6 Morning**

Numbers 12:1-3 *1 Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. 2 "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this.3 (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)*

Moses family didn’t approve of his marriage. We don’t know what happened to Zipporah, his first wife. The new wife was an Egyptian, probably one of the multitude that came out with the Israelites to worship the God of the Hebrews. I think Moses was big enough to make his own decisions, and godly enough not to be second-guessed. The real issue is leadership. Who has the final say? “Shouldn’t we vote on whether or not this is the right decision? God speaks to us too! Why should he remarry at his age (80+yrs)?”

Yes, God does speak to them. We just saw in the last chapter how His Spirit was placed upon the elders. The question remains, who will have the final say? It is a power struggle, and not the last one we will see in the desert. The power belongs to God. He’s in charge. He is leading through his servant Moses, but helping him through the elders. This most humble of men does not defend himself and his decision to marry, but God will defend him.

We can know that if we are walking with the LORD, in humble submission to Him, that we need not defend ourselves. The office of the prophet as the intermediary between God and man has since ceased (Luke 16:16). The Holy Spirit communes with each of us, and we have His Word. Still, the principle is the same. We will often be questioned, and sometimes our whole family will be against us (Matthew 10:36). We should know that we need not argue our case. If it is a righteous decision, the LORD will defend us. If it is not a godly decision, we will see by the fruit and learn from our mistake. That is genuine humility.

Meditation: Can I trust God to defend my godly decisions?

**March 6 Evening**

Matthew 16:13-15 *13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" 14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"*

Caesarea Philippi was a city at the source of the Jordan River twenty miles north of Galilee. It consisted mostly of Gentile people. It was a center for the worship of the Greek god Pan, because of a great water cavern. This was the northern most outreach of Jesus’ ministry. It was here, in view of all the idolatry of that city, that Jesus asked His disciples who people thought Him to be. Their answer of John the Baptist shows us that they did not actually mean reincarnation, but the spirit and anointing of that person. John had recently died while Christ was living. It was hard to accept the loss of the prophet so well received. Calling Jesus Elijah was quite a compliment. He is considered one of the greatest prophets and was known to be quite confrontational. Jeremiah was the unaccepted prophet. Jesus is mentioned weeping two separate times. Some thought that perhaps He was a new prophet.

The question of all time was put to the disciples. Who do you say the Son of Man is? “Son of Man” is Jesus’ most common term for Himself. God called Ezekiel by this title. Perhaps it was to keep him humble through the many revelations and visions he saw. Daniel used the term to refer to the coming Messiah (Daniel 7:13). Which of these two did the disciples think applied to Jesus?

Who do you say He is? Your eternal destiny is riding on the answer. It is easy to just repeat Peter’s answer, but what is your real answer? Looking at Jesus standing there in view of all the world’s belief systems, what will you say to Him? Has the Father revealed to you who He is, or are you just repeating the answer that is expected? Dear reader, stop for a moment from the business of life, and ask yourself what you really believe. If you say He is the Messiah, your Savior, God incarnate, what kind of a life focus does that call for in response to that fact? Are you living it? If not, how will you go about making a shift to that focus? If you answer, “I don’t really know”, then ask the Father to reveal His Son to you.

Consider: Who do you say the Son of Man is?

**March 7 Morning**

Numbers 13:30-32 *30 Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." 31 But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." 32 And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size.*

Twelve spies went out to the Land of Promise, the land that God promised to

Abraham. Upon return, only two believed that they could take the land, Joshua and Caleb. These men were generals, the leading warriors in Israel’s army. The other ten spread a bad report and warned that they would be devoured. Looking back, it seems amazing that they did not have the faith to proceed. God had promised to go before them and drive out the enemy. They had evidence of wonderful fruit. The generals said it could be done. The alternative is to stay in the desert. Why would they listen to the eight pessimists?

Indeed, why do we? We have the promises of God. We have seen His provision. We have seen the wonderful fruit from the Land of Promise in the lives of those who have gone in before us. The Generals (Apostles and Prophets) all say, *"We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."* And yet we listen to the pessimists.

What giants are you fearing? Do you really want to wander in the desert? Are the giants so big in God’s eyes? And whose battle is it anyway? Obey the call of God, and march forward in faith. He will go before you and the land and all the fruit of it will be yours. Walk by faith and not by sight!

Meditation: Am I listening to the voice of faith or doubt?

**March 7 Evening**

Matthew 16:21-23 *21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. 22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" 23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."*

From a study of the chronological life of Jesus, we see this turning point came right before the transfiguration. Three of the disciples would witness the glory of Jesus. Their eyes would confirm what they had been thinking in their hearts. Yet, they still had an earthly kingdom mindset. Jesus had to prepare them for the shock they were about to face, suffering at the hands of religious leaders, killed, but rising again to life.

Peter had just been commended for his perception of the revelation of God that Jesus is the Messiah. Then Peter became an instrument of Satan. How did he go from one extreme to the other so quickly? He turned back to minding the things of men. When we have a heavenly mindset, influenced by the Holy Spirit, the ways and preferences of man are not a priority. We seek out the ways and preferences of God. When that means pain and loss, there is a temptation to retreat to man’s ways. Peter loved Jesus. Yet, his love was brotherly kind of love, and he knew it. It was not the love of God that prefers others above yourself.

We often resort to minding the things of men. It is our old nature. We think it is safer, but if we could see through God’s eyes, we would see it is foolishness. It ends in vanity. It is the ways of God and the mind of Christ that produces fruit that remains. May the Lord help us to see beyond the present pain, filling our minds with His thoughts, to see the eternal good He produces through suffering and loss in this life. Peter did not cling to His revelation that Jesus was Messiah for very long, but God is not done working in Peter. There are still some crash landings and recoveries that are ahead in the story, but it ends with God finishing the work He started in him.

Consider: Take heart, fellow alien. He will finish His work in you too!

**March 8 Morning**

Numbers 14:18-19 *18 'The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.' 19 In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now."*

The LORD was ready to exterminate these whining people when Moses interceded for them. Because of the fact that God knows the future, I think He was not as desirous to destroy them as much as He was to bring out the heart of intercession in Moses. Moses interceded with God according to the character of God that had been revealed to him. He’s saying, “Wait a minute. You told me You were abounding in love and forgiveness. You are just, but then there is that wonderful side of You that is so great in love. Exercise that love now, and forgive these people.”

When we plead with God according to His wonderful attributes, we are standing on a sure footing from which to plead. We can make a case that is legitimate. The people would be punished, but at the same time, God would exercise His great love. God answered Moses’ prayer because He was pleading according to the attributes of God. That is how we should pray too.

Do you know God is abounding in love? You can count on that. Just as He forgave them all the way from Egypt to the entrance of the Promised Land (a picture of our journey from the world to heaven), so will He forgive you when you look to His wonderful attributes. He forgives us not because of what we do but because of who He is. Yet, there is a warning here. We may not arrive at all He had for us because of our insistence on sin. That sin will affect generations to follow. Learn from these rebels who are so like us, and cast yourself upon the LORD.

Meditation: How can I follow Moses example of intercession?

**March 8 Evening**

Matthew 16:24-26 *24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*

After Jesus rebuked Peter for having man’s preference over God’s, He uttered these challenging words. Peter had a revelation that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. What was he going to do about it? He wanted to cling to Jesus physical presence. No one wants to lose their closest friend. But Jesus tells us that if we want to follow Him, we must deny ourselves. We have to put God’s desires above our own. To take up a cross meant that you had received the death sentence. All that was left was a short walk and the painful execution. That doesn’t sound like our portrayal of Christianity. But wait, we aren’t done with what He required. Then He adds, “Follow me”. Deny self, take the death sentence, and follow! Wherever He leads I’ll go. I no longer direct my life!

Then Jesus shared a bit of Kingdom reality. If you are planning on saving your life, that is, keeping it for your own use, you will end up losing it. But if you lose your life, if you give it to God for Jesus’ sake, you will find the purpose and meaning that God intended when He fashioned you in your mother’s womb. That is an all or nothing expression of Kingdom reality. You hear it or you don’t.

To emphasize the point, He asked what good it would be if you gained everything? Isn’t that what saving your life is about? It is the attempt to gain the pleasures and treasures of this world. The result is a forfeiture of the soul.

Consider: Would you give up your eternal soul for the entire planet and all the world systems have to offer? No? Then deny yourself. Take up your cross. Follow Jesus!

**March 9 Morning**

Numbers 14:28, 33 *28 So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say:*

*33 Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert.*

The nation had come right up to the boundaries of the Promised Land and been afraid to trust God. They wanted to kill Moses and Joshua and elect a new leader to take them back to Egypt. Their lament was, “If only we had died in Egypt or in this wilderness.” So God gave them their request. They wished they had died in the wilderness, and their sentence is exactly what they asked for. That is often the sentence God gives man, what he demands. If we could just have faith that what He has planned for us is so much better than our own ideas, we would move forward into the Promised Land. Instead, many demand death in the desert.

That is a sad thing, and yet it is what we asked for. But the really sad thing is that our children suffer from our faithless choices. While we are wandering in the wilderness, they are wandering with us. Instead of settling them down in the Promised Land, and giving them a better start in their life, we leave the battles ahead to them. Faith and the fruit of it is the greatest inheritance you could possibly leave your children. A nice cave in the desert near a spring does not compare.

How is your life affecting your children? Are you beginning a legacy of faith or building a foundation for them on shifting sand? Our lives affect so much more than our own daily comfort. What are you sowing?

Meditation: What kind of spiritual legacy will I leave my children?

**March 9 Evening**

Matthew 17:2, 4-5 *2 There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. 4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"*

Scholars struggle with the location of this mountain. They believed it was Mount Tabor until an archeological discovery showed that people lived on Tabor at that time. Remember, they were in Caesarea Philippi immediately preceding this. Many now believe it was Mount Hermon. The prophets, Moses and Elijah, talked with Jesus and Jesus’ glory was revealed. Moses may be representing the Law and Elijah represented the prophets. Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the prophets.

What exactly they spoke of is a mystery (Luke 9:30). Peter, never at a loss for something to say, suggested he build three shelters for them so they could stay awhile. Mountaintop experiences are short and powerful times of encouragement to strengthen us for the return to the valley. We aren’t meant to stay up there. Our work is down here among humanity. Jesus warned them of His death before He allowed them see His glory.

The only other words recorded from this experience are that of Almighty God. God repeating what He had said at Jesus’ baptism, only He added one more sentence. “Listen to Him!” The Jews understood a cloud to be the presence of God. They had the story of the cloud on Mount Sinai. Notice the passage says, “while he was still speaking”. God interrupted Peter. Peter had nothing important to say, but Jesus does. This man, Jesus, is the Son of God. He is loved of God. His actions are pleasing to God. You better listen to Him! That is what Moses prophesied 1500 years earlier in Deuteronomy 18:15 (NIV) *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.* God said it through Moses, and then He spoke directly to them. Listen to Jesus!

Consider: We often wish God would speak to us in an audible voice. I think if He did, you would hear the same message. He has been speaking it throughout the ages. “Listen to Jesus!” Take the time to hear Him today.

**March 10 Morning**

Numbers 14:44-45 *44 Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the high hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the Lord's covenant moved from the camp.45 Then the Amalekites and Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah.*

The Israelites had come right up to the border of the Promised Land but refused to go in because of fear. When they heard the alternative, they changed their mind. “If it was God’s will before, won’t God bless us if we do it now?” They wanted to save themselves from the consequences of sin by obeying now, but it was too late. They had already complained, whined, and refused to obey.

The cloud did not lead them even though they were now willing. They decided to go anyway without Moses and the Ark of the Covenant, without God. They were soundly defeated.

Timing and circumstance affect the will of God. It was God’s will for them to enter in when they first heard the report. After their reaction to the report, it was no longer God’s will. They had to reap the consequences of their decisions. You can’t go back in time and make it right. You have to face the music. If at any time you decide to go back to escape the consequences, God will not be with you. Deal with the consequences of sin asking for God’s help. If you are repentant, God will be with you as you face them. Since they had failed to obey, the next best thing was to obey God in the days to come, not go back and try to change things. Obey instantly when the first instruction comes. It is a tough lesson with heavy penalties. Learn to obey the first time. Realize that God’s instructions are the best route for you.

Prayer: Lord, sensitize my heart to realize your leading is the best direction. Help me obey your voice and not give in to fear.

**March 10 Evening**

Matthew 17:18-20 *18 Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" 20 He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."*

Faith is like being pregnant. There is something in your womb or there isn’t. It is not about how mature it is, but how certain it is. When the disciples were asked to heal this boy, something in them said, “We can’t.” They must have said and done all the right things, but it is not about a formula. It is about faith. Faith is the substance of things hoped for. It is the evidence of things unseen. Jesus had no problem casting out the demon, because He knew it was God’s will and God’s time and that God had the power. He was certain.

“Why couldn’t we do it?” they asked. They lacked sufficient faith. It doesn’t take much. A mustard seed is much smaller than as a pinhead. If you have that much you can move a mountain. Indeed, nothing would be impossible to you! That doesn’t mean you can run around rearranging mountain ranges. In Jesus’ day, moving a mountain meant moving an insurmountable difficulty or obstruction. When you are sure of God’s will, your words spoken into a situation are His command to the natural or supernatural world.

Some texts add, “This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” It is my humble opinion (I am not a scholar) that these additions were placed in the text by early copyists for clarification. IF that is the case, or if someone relayed later that Jesus did say that, the prayer and fasting are the means of certainty in knowing the Father’s will and timing in a given matter. With that certainty, one can act in faith. The principle is true, regardless if you accept the additional text or not.

Consider: We must take time in His presence to know the will of God in a given situation if we are to be the channel for His power.

**March 11 Morning**

Numbers 20:8, 10-11 *8 "Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink."*

*10 He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?"11 Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.*

This is the second time the LORD commanded Moses to bring water from the Rock. The first time God told Moses to strike the rock with his rod. This second time Moses was told to speak to the rock. Instead, Moses spoke some harsh words to the complaining people and struck the Rock twice. We can hardly blame him for being upset. This incident was cited as the reason he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. What is so horrible?

We must remember that the LORD spoke clearly to Moses. Moses was not trying to discern what the LORD was leading him to do. In 1Corinthians 10 we learn that this rock is a picture of Jesus. The first time we come to Him for the water of life, we find that He had to be struck for us that the water of life might flow out. He was struck in receiving punishment for our sins upon the cross.

Once struck, He need never be struck again. All we need to do is speak to our Rock, and the water of Life is freely given to us. What a prophetic picture God was painting! But Moses marred it. Notice that in Moses’ anger he also said that he and Aaron were the ones bringing out the water from the rock. God alone can do that. Moses fell into the fatal error of many leaders. He suggested that he is the one who meets their needs, pointing to himself instead of to God. We must always be careful to give God all the glory.

Meditation: Since Jesus was struck for me, now all I need to do is speak to Him and the water of life will flow out to me.

**March 11 Evening**

Matthew 18:2-4 *2 He called a little child and had him stand among them. 3 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

The disciples had asked about who was greatest in the kingdom of heaven. They probably expected to hear that Moses or Elijah or some other great Old Testament figure was. It must have been shocking when Jesus took a child and stood him in their midst and set him up as the model. I’m sure the child was speechless along with the disciples.

Jesus said that they had to become like little children to even enter the kingdom.

What did we lose in growing up? Jesus tells us in the next statement. It is the humility of a little child that qualifies one for greatness. As we grow into young men and women we think we know it all. It takes the rest of our lives to realize we had it right when we were little children utterly dependent on others to teach and instruct us.

Jesus modeled this childlike humility. He did nothing but what His Father showed Him. He made no judgments on His own but that which the Father determined. He even depended on the Father to show Him what to say and how to say it. Once we realize how little we know, how easily we are deceived, and how much we need to rely upon the Spirit of God for making any correct decisions, we should become like that little child. That is why broken leaders make the best leaders. They realize their fallibility. The analogy of sheep teaches the same lesson. Face it; we are stupid, vulnerable, and cannot care for ourselves. Once you realize that, you have become poor in spirit and the kingdom of heaven is yours (Mat. 5:2).

Meditation: Greatness lies in being lowest, not highest.

**March 12 Morning**

Numbers 21:8-9 *8 The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." 9 So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.*

After more wandering in the wilderness because of their refusal to trust God, the Children of Israel became impatient. They began to complain again about their conditions. It was their own actions and their own requests that had placed them there, but they began to blame it on Moses. It is always easier to point the finger at someone else than to consider our role in our difficulties.

God sent poisonous snakes amongst them as a judgment. (There are still poisonous snakes with a fiery bite in that region of the desert) The people began to cry out to Moses for help. Our song changes from a whine to a plea when we are in a life and death situation.

The LORD’s instruction was to take a pole and place upon it a bronze snake. If the people would just turn and look at it they would be healed from the deadly venom. Here is another wonderful picture of what God did for us. Bronze is representative of judgment. The snake is the cursed being that was used by Satan to trick Eve and thereby bring the venom of sin and death into the world. One day that sin would be judged upon a pole (John 3:15). All we need to do to be cured of sin’s deadly venom is to look and live. If we will have faith that sin has been judged in the One who hung there, we will live. Thank the LORD for His wonderful plan of salvation. Look and live!

Prayer: Thank You Lord, for making it so easy for me to come to You. Help me look to You daily and live.

**March 12 Evening**

Matthew 18:12-14 *12 "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? 13 And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. 14 In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.*

We often disconnect this parable from children. Jesus was speaking on the subject of how precious children are to God. He was using an illustration that the hearers all understood. Sheep need a shepherd. They cannot survive on their own. They need someone to guide them to pasture, water, and to protect them from predators.

In this parable, one sheep wonders off. This is quite common. Though the sheep tend to congregate for protection, there are those independent ones that tend to wander. The danger is that they will fall into an inescapable crag or be eaten by predators. The shepherd will leave the flock, which endangers the flock, to find that one lost sheep. When he finds it, it is often weak from insufficient pasture and water. He usually has to carry it back. Still, he is joyful that the sheep has been recovered. Sometimes we look at children, both physical and spiritual, who are independent thinkers and wonder if they are worth the effort. Jesus is saying that they are indeed. The one who is able to help them return to the fold is happier about that restoration than about the others who did not stray.

Sometimes that sheep will repeatedly wander away. Then the shepherd of Jesus’ day had one option, to break the sheep’s leg. That would mean he would have to carry it for the next six weeks, hand feeding it. When the sheep recovers, it will never leave the shepherd’s side. Severe discipline costs the shepherd a great deal of effort, but it is worth saving the sheep.

Consider: The Father is not willing that any be lost, even the most rebellious.

**March 13 Morning**

Numbers 22:31-32 *31 Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown. 32 The angel of the LORD asked him, "Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me*.

It is interesting that animals can see the spiritual realm, but man must have his eyes opened. Balaam’s donkey had tried to avoid the angel in the road with a drawn sword. Balaam could not see the angel at first, and so he beat his donkey for what he thought was stubbornness. The angel of the LORD (Whom I believe is Jesus) enabled the beast to talk. Then the angel asked why Balaam had beaten his donkey. It seems God cares for these beasts. Proverbs tell us that a righteous man regards the life of his beast.

Though the LORD gave Balaam permission to go visit with the leaders that wanted to curse Israel, we later find out that Balaam’s heart was giving in to greed.

He knew God did not want to curse them, but he was holding out hope that he could somehow receive the reward offered. We have to watch carefully for these subtle heart changes from obedience and submission to greed. Don’t dwell on what the world has to offer.

The LORD was angry with Balaam, even though they seemed to be on talking terms. The more we know, the more we are accountable. Balaam knew God and communed with Him, but greed captured his heart. He spurned his relationship with God by going after gain. When our path is a reckless one that will harm us, the faithfulness of God comes to oppose our recklessness. That is the mercy of God.

Meditation: Have I met the resistance of God opposing my recklessness? Do I recognize it as God’s mercy?

**March 13 Evening**

Matthew 18:15-17 *15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*

This is the only passage in the New Testament that tells how to practically go about resolving a conflict between brothers in Christ. If we would follow it carefully, we would resolve many conflicts before they got to the point of being irreparable. Step one: The one who is offended goes to the one that offended him, one on one. 90% of issues will be resolved there. Usually it is a misunderstanding or something that was done unintentionally. Do it quickly before bitterness takes root. Once you become embittered, no response will be sufficient to restore the relationship.

Step two: If there is no resolution, or the offending brother refuses to listen, then take along two or three witnesses. Ideally there should only be five people at the most that know about the problem. We get into trouble when we start telling others and forming groups to support one another’s perception of what happened. Everyone wants support and sympathy, but the godly way is to keep those that know limited in an attempt to resolve the issue.

Finally, if the brother refuses to listen, then take it to the church. Some interpret this to mean the elders of the congregation you attend. Others believe this means to bring it before the entire church body for resolution. If the brother refuses to listen to the church, (this assumes the church will be of one mind) treat him as a pagan or tax collector. This is one of Jesus’ few teachings about the church. Jesus is referring to believers that gather to worship. It really did not exist at the time, so Jesus is looking into the future and specifically addressing a future need for His followers in in fellowship with one another.

Then the question is how to treat a pagan or tax collector. Is Jesus saying how the Jews treated them or how He and His disciples did? One of them was a tax collector. Treat them as those in need of salvation, loving them, but not considering them a part of the body of the local church. That would still offer hope that things could be restored if they would repent.

Remember: Commit yourself to follow Jesus’ conflict resolution pattern.

**March 14 Morning**

Numbers 23:19 *19 God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?*

Balaam tells the heathen king that is trying to curse Israel, “Look, I told you before, and God doesn’t change His mind. Israel is blessed! If God blesses them, I can’t curse them!” Sometimes we wish God would change His mind. If we knew all His reasons, we would probably change our mind. Too often we think of God as we do man, and that is where we run into trouble. As Jacob said of Rueben, man is “unstable as water”. Like a liquid we fit the container of our circumstances. But God never changes!

He has no need to lie. Since He is all knowing, He was never misinformed about any given situation. Being all-powerful, He never lacked the power to carry through on His purposes. Being everywhere present, nothing has ever escaped His attention or sneaked up on Him. He will not change His mind. The wonderful thing about that is we know He will forever accept what Christ has done in our place. He will never one day decide it wasn’t enough. He will never demand more than what Jesus already did for you. He has spoken and He will act. Satan can never surprise attack Him. God has promised, and He will fulfill.

Balaam forgot his own words and later tried to get financial gain by tempting Israel into compromise. He may have reasoned that if they compromised they would then lose God’s favor. Our minds can reason their way around what we know is true. God never changes! What He has said is the way it is. Don’t try and figure a way around it.

Consider: Why would I want God to change what He has said?

**March 14 Evening**

Matthew 18:33-35 *33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."*

After Jesus’ exhortation on how to approach one who has sinned against you, He followed with a parable of forgiveness. The parable tells of a master forgiving an insurmountable debt. The master called his servant back and rebuked him for not giving mercy after being shown mercy.

Every one of us is a testimony to the mercy and grace of God. The parable shows that we should in turn be merciful to those indebted to us. Then Jesus gave a severe warning in the text for today. The heavenly Father will have us thrown in jail and tortured until we pay our debt. This is the same as Jesus’ warning after His teaching the disciples to pray. *“For if you forgive not men their sins, neither will your Father in heaven forgive you!”* Forgiveness is expected of those who have experienced the forgiveness of God.

We find forgiveness in Christ’s own grace within us. He was able to even forgive those who had betrayed and crucified Him. He realized they did not know what they were doing. Those who have offended us often do not realize what they are doing. Even when people intentionally harm us, we need to forgive for our own sake. The torture we experience often is the mental repeating of the offending party’s words. Forgive for your peace of mind.

Remember: Forgive because Christ forgave you when you did not deserve forgiveness. Forgive because it is Christ like.

**March 15 Morning**

Numbers 27:16-17 *16 "May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community 17 to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd."*

Moses was not going to be allowed to go on with the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. He had a heart for the people and knew they needed a strong leader to turn them from sin. They needed a commander who would go before them into battle and inspire them to keep up the fight. Where would you find someone with a heart like Moses, who would plead for the people before God?

He prayed the above prayer, asking God to send a man with a real shepherd’s heart. God answered that prayer in Joshua. Joshua is the Old Testament form of the New Testament name Jesus. In that day, God fulfilled that prayer in Joshua. Joshua didn’t completely finish the job though. As great a leader as he was, some of the enemy remained in the land. One enemy group deceived him into making a treaty. The Children of Israel grew weary and would not drive the others out. The result was constant battles throughout Israel’s history. Along with that came the influence of idolatry that was the greatest of all poisons to Israel.

Ultimately, God answered that prayer in Jesus. He is our Shepherd. Unlike the first Joshua, He can lead us to victory over all enemies. He is not tricked into any compromises. A man became our Shepherd. He protects, leads, feeds, and cares for us, the sheep of His pasture. Thank God for the ultimate answer to this prayer and for His great ability to lead us into complete victory without compromise!

Meditation: Jesus goes before me into battle. I just need to follow.

**March 15 Evening**

Matthew 19:24-26 *24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" 26 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

A rich young man approached Jesus. He inquired of Jesus which laws were necessary to keep to enter into heaven. Many Jews believed that if they could narrow down the laws to those most important to God, they would stand a better chance of getting into heaven. Jesus asked the man to sell all he owned, give it to the poor, and follow Him. This came at a time when Jesus only had about a week before the crucifixion.

The man went away sorrowful. Jesus had put His finger on the one thing that kept this young man from God. He trusted in his wealth. Then Jesus told the disciples something that astounded them, the camel and eye of the needle analogy. Some of the gates around Jerusalem were not of great height. To get a camel through, the baggage had to be taken off. The camel had to be pulled through on its knees. The picture is a forsaking of wealth and acceptance of humility. Jews thought wealth was a sign of God’s blessing, so the disciples asked, “Who then can be saved?” It is the same for all men. It is not a keeping of the Law or any outward thing. It is the miraculous work of God within the heart of man.

Remember: Salvation is a work of God’s grace. Nothing you can do will make God love you any more. However, clinging to the world may keep you from opening your hands to receive His grace.

**March 16 Morning**

Numbers 33:55 *55 "'But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live.*

Moses warned the Children of Israel. He told them they needed to drive out all the inhabitants of the land God had given them. We know from archeology that the people that lived there practiced some very dark religions that included the burning of live babies and lewd sexual fertility practices. God was establishing a nation that represented Him at the crossroads of the world. If the impression the world received was mixed with evil then the message too would be mixed and unclear.

Unfortunately they did not endure to see God’s will done in this matter. It caused them many problems, and they were tempted to incorporate the religion of those people into Judaism. It was easier at the time of taking the Promised Land to leave those areas that were the most difficult to conquer. It was harder for later generations to deal with the descendants of those people.

That principle carries on to this day. If we will deal with the difficult issues in our lives when we are made aware of them, we will save ourselves and our children problems in the future. If we compromise and do not allow the Lord to take full possession of our hearts, our children and we will pay the price later. When the Lord makes you aware of an unsurrendered area in your heart, don’t compromise.

Deal with it. Make it His. You can justify anything if you want, but you and your children will pay the price. That thing will be barbs in your eyes, skewing the way you see the world. It will be thorns in your sides, causing you to move in directions you would not otherwise.

Consider: *They will give you trouble in the land where you will live.* Deal with it now.

**March 16 Evening**

Matthew 19:28-30 *28 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.*

After Jesus exhortation to the rich young ruler, Peter asked what it meant for them to have left all to follow Jesus. First, Jesus promises the disciples places of authority in the coming kingdom. Then He addresses all who suffer loss for His sake. The promise is one hundred times what you left and eternal life! The eternal life part would be enough, but there is more. In the kingdom, people will receive a reward for their labor and their loss.

Jesus sums it up by saying His kingdom is often opposite to that of the world. Many of the first will be last, and many who are last will be first. The upside down world of the kingdom promises to do right to those who have suffered loss. If you are following Jesus with your whole heart, you will experience this loss. It may be the forsaking of a career, a friendship, or physical assets. Whatever the loss from following Jesus, let your heart rest assured that one hundred times awaits you. You have sown the physical and you will reap one hundred times in the kingdom. The gospel of Mark adds that you will receive it in this age and in the age to come (Mark 10:30).

Consider: Can you think of any investment plan that reaps greater dividends?

**March 17 Morning**

Deuteronomy 1:38 *38 But your assistant, Joshua son of Nun, will enter it. Encourage him, because he will lead Israel to inherit it.*

How appropriate that the one, whose name in English is Jesus, should lead them into the Promised Land. He leads us to inherit all that God has for us. There in the wilderness, Moses was telling the people that Joshua was going to need their encouragement.

Leadership is listed as one of the gifts in Romans 12:8  *if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.* Just because some have and use this gift does not mean they can do it on their own. They need others using their gifts as well. The first gift mentioned in the Romans passage is encouragement.

We think of the gifts as uniquely New Testament, but they were there to some extent in the Old Testament too. Leaders tend toward discouragement because they see more of the problems than most. They are also the target of criticism when things are not going well. Some are not satisfied because their personal preferences are not acted upon and let the leader know it. A number of times Moses had experienced the discouragement that comes with leading at God’s direction. He knew how much encouragement is needed.

Encourage your leaders. Of course they can get a big head and become prideful like anyone else, but most are in need of hearing an honest encouraging word. Look for the things that you sense are the leading of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the Elders around you, and encourage them with the testimony of how it has ministered to you. They don’t need flattery, but they do need honest encouragement.

Consider dropping them a note or giving them a call. Anyone can be an encourager.

**March 17 Evening**

Matthew 20:26-28 *26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Jesus had spoken of thrones that the disciples would receive because they had left all to follow Him. The mother of James and John asked that they be on the ones closest to Jesus. That would be the most prominent positions. Once again, Jesus must help them understand the difference between the kingdoms of men and the kingdom of God. He pointed out how Gentile authorities use their power to have their way, to control and push others around. Jesus said, “Not so among you.” If you want to be great, serve others. God’s way up is down. If you want to be first, serve others. Your worth to God is often the opposite of what it is to men.

Then Jesus used His own life as an example. He was not there seeking out people to serve Him. He was serving as many as He could, healing, teaching, feeding, and setting them free. Not only was He serving, but He was also about to lay down His life as the ultimate act of service to the Father and man. Do you want to be great, truly great? Give your life to God and see how He would have you serve Him and mankind. Just as He had a plan for the life of His Son, He has a plan for your life. We would all like to think that means importance in the eyes of men, but that is rarely the case. It often means humiliation in the eyes of man.

Consider: Is your life about serving, or being served?

**March 18 Morning**

Deuteronomy 4:7-8 *7 What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? 8 And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?*

Our God fills the universe, and yet He is near everyone, ready to commune with hearts that are receptive to Him. He is over all and yet willing to have a personal relationship with those who seek Him in truth. There has never been a god invented by any religion that is so great and so loving as the God of the Bible. We did not invent our God. He revealed Himself to us. He continues to reveal Himself to us as long as we continue to seek the wonder of His infinite greatness.

Though Israel was a nation with the privilege of seeing Him move on their behalf, all the nations that came in contact with Israel could witness the same and decide if they wanted to pursue the God of Israel. He would be just as near any of them that sought Him whenever they prayed to Him.

What really made Israel unique was that they had the recorded word of God. The laws that they received were full of the Creator’s instructions that kept them from the diseases and injustices that the nations around them experienced. The revealed Word gave them a new culture, the culture of God. Even the culture was meant to be a witness to the nations.

Consider: Appreciate the fact that you have a God that is near when you pray by spending time with Him in prayer. The effects of your life in the Word and prayer will speak to those you meet and show them that there is a Living God who is near to those who call upon Him.

**March 18 Evening**

Matthew 21:12-13 *12 Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. 13 "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"*

Jesus had cleaned out the outer court of the Temple on the first Passover of His ministry (John 2:15). At the last Passover, He did it again. The outer court was the area dedicated for the nations of the world to come and pray to Jehovah. The religious leaders had allowed it to become a market for exchanging coins to pay the Temple tax and for the purchase of sacrificial animals. The archeological finds of opulent homes of the priests indicates there may have been some financial gain for them in allowing this to take place there. Instead of a quiet courtyard for people to come before God, it was a noisy business center. It had also become a shortcut from one side of the city to the other. You can bet the religious leaders would never have allowed any of this to go on in the inner courts! It was a blatant disregard for the call of God to the Jewish people to present the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to the world. It was an attitude that said, “We know God, and we could care less about the rest of you that don’t know Him.” That was a complete misrepresentation of God who loves the world.

We are the temple of God today. Is your heart a quiet place of seeking after God and communing with Him, or is it filled with busy shouts of profiteering? Is our heart a place of merchandise or praise and thanksgiving? Our testimony can present the mandates and price tags of ritual, or the peaceful invitation to commune with God. Jesus’ desire is for our hearts to be a house of prayer. His heart is for the nations. If your heart is a house of prayer, the worshipful atmosphere of the outward expression of your life will draw the nations to Him. You will be bringing the outer court of prayer to every unbeliever you meet.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, make my place of worship and my heart a house of prayer.

**March 19 Morning**

Deuteronomy 4:9 *9 Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.*

Israel had seen so much since the days when Moses began to confront Pharaoh. If they could just remember all God had done and the lessons that He had taught them. If their children could only learn those stories by vivid storytelling, so that they would cling to the lessons, what a difference it would make in their future and the choices they would make! It would save them from such heartache and sorrow.

They were warned to be careful and watch themselves closely so as not to forget and let the lessons slip from their heart. We have the same warning in the New Testament. Hebrews 2:1 *We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.* And how much more it applies to us who know all that God did to provide the Way of salvation for us in His only Son?

We need to teach our children the lessons of the Word and those from our own lives. We need to remember the testimonies of when God met us and share them with our children. We need to share the wonder of when the Word came alive to us and spoke to us personally. When we do that, we not only encourage their faith, but we set an example that will affect future generations. Never fear sharing your personal walk with God with your children. They need to hear about it. It also reminds you of the lessons you have learned and helps prevent them from slipping from your heart.

Consider setting aside a time to share with your children the things that the LORD has shown you.

**March 19 Evening**

Matthew 21:42-44 *42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? 43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44 He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."*

During the days leading up to the cross, Jesus told a parable that summed up that turning point in history. A man built a vineyard and lent it out. When it came time to collect the rent, the renters of the vineyard beat the servant that was sent to collect. They killed the next person that was sent and stoned the third. Finally the owner sent his son. He thought they would surely respect and honor him. The renters thought that if they killed the heir, they would inherit the vineyard, so they killed the son. Then Jesus asks what will be done to the renters. The crowd answers with words that will condemn them. *"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."*

Jesus responded with our passage for today. He knew He was about to be rejected by them in favor of a political activist. The vineyard is the world in which the Jews were the keepers of the Word of God. The tenants are the Jewish people. They killed the prophets and they were about to have the Son killed. He reminded them that this was prophesied long ago. The rejected Son would be the culmination of the work of God. From that point, the word was going directly to the Gentiles. Looking over history, we have not done much better than the Jews, but the Word has gone out into all the world. I believe that is the fruit that God is looking for.

The final warning is quite ominous. We have two choices. We can resist the stone, Jesus, and end up crushed by Him, or we can fall upon Him and be broken vessels for His use. There is no other choice. Here is another ‘either or’ statement of Christ. Let us be sure to take the choice that has us throwing ourselves on Him for mercy and grace.

Consider: Am I a broken vessel that He can use?

**March 20 Morning**

Deuteronomy 4:29-31a *29 But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul. 30 When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey him. 31a For the LORD your God is a merciful God…*

Moses warned the people that if they worshipped other gods and did not keep the covenant, they would become captives of other nations. God states that the reason is because He is a jealous God. The word for ‘jealous’ in Hebrew includes the meaning of a white-hot fire. God is passionate about those He has chosen. He will bring into their lives whatever it will take to turn them back to the good. He promises, in this passage, that if from that place of slavery you will seek the LORD you will find Him. But that is accompanied by a big “if.” The condition is looking with all our heart and soul. That is why they went into captivity, their hearts were mixed, thinking satisfaction and fulfillment lay in God plus something else.

God allows distress to come into our lives to turn us back to Him. Then we get a sense of the reality of life without Him and become desperate to be in Him. That is when He will help us turn back to Him. Why? Why would God want His unfaithful bride back after she so willingly sought other lovers?

He is merciful. The LORD our God is a merciful God. Mercy forgives and forgets and loves once again. We have been recipients of this mercy as Israel was. It is now our duty to be merciful to others. Forgive and forget and love again so that you will be a reflection of the wonderful God who loves you.

Consider: Whom do I need to forgive, and what steps will I take to see that I do?

**March 20 Evening**

Matthew 22:8-10 *8 "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9 Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.*

One of Jesus’ parables during the final week was of a king who invited guests to his son’s wedding. In that culture it would have been insulting and arrogant to refuse to attend such an important event. Those first invited ignored the invitation and even abused the messengers, killing some of them. The king sent his army to execute justice, but the wedding preparations sat waiting. Then the king sent more servants out to invite anyone they found. The banquet hall was filled with both good and bad guests.

This is about the call to the Jews to be the bride of the Son. They refused to accept Christ. They mistreated and killed the prophets. Then the gospel went out to all. I’m one of the bad ones that were found. Thank God that He did not just ask the servants to look for only good people. We are already partaking of all the generosity of the King. One day we will actually sit at the wedding feast of the Lamb of God. What an honor!

There was a man there without a wedding gown. It was the custom of the time for the host provided a white gown for all the guests upon their arrival at the feast. Someone had refused to wear the gown. He was promptly thrown out. The gown is the righteousness of Christ. *“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.”* That is the only reason that the good and the bad can both be there. We are clothed with Christ. Without that covering, it would not matter how good we were, we would still be refusing to accept the covering our King has provided. Jesus closes the parable by saying that many are called but few are chosen. If you have heard the call, be sure you put on Christ. That is the only thing that makes you acceptable in that place and a witness here below.

Consider: What does it mean to be clothed in Christ?

**March 21 Morning**

Deuteronomy 4:39-40 *39 Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other. 40 Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time.*

Moses reminded the people of the ways in which God had made Himself known to them. Then he spoke these verses. I believe God has shown each person reading this devotional a revelation of Himself. It is because He has drawn each of us uniquely that we are responsible to acknowledge and take to heart that the LORD is God in heaven above and earth below. There is no other! There should be no valid competitor for our allegiance. There should be no usurpers to His lordship over our lives. If we are bowing to anything else, in any way, we are not rendering to God the response He deserves. Is there *“no other”* god in your life? Take that to heart this day.

The enemy of our soul would love to distort the reason God directs and instructs us, just as he did in the Garden of Eden. God wants us to keep His instructions “*so that it may go well with you and your children”.* In the Old Testament, the Spirit was not indwelling believers. That made generalized rules necessary as standards of conduct and health. Today the Spirit indwells every believer to instruct us specifically in every situation, “*so that it may go well with you and your children”.* God can do His work without you, but He wants to include you to bless you and your children. Many of us have fallen prey to the enemy’s lie in the Garden and think God wants uninformed slaves.

Consider: Acknowledge that the heart of God, in instructing and leading you by the Spirit, is to bless you and your children. You will be much more excited about obeying His voice.

**March 21 Evening**

Matthew 22:19-21 *19 Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, 20 and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" 21 "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."*

The religious leaders sent some of their students along with some of the government supporters to try to trap Jesus. First they buttered Him up with some high praise. Then they asked a tricky question. Jesus saw right through their flattery to their real nature. He called them hypocrites (actors). Then He asked a question that should have struck the heart of anyone that may have been serious about their relationship with God. Why are you trying to trap me? He’s asking them to check the motivation of their hearts.

The question they asked was clever because almost any answer would offend some of His followers. If He says to pay the taxes, the zealot nationalists would be offended. If He says to refuse to pay them, those who support the government would have reason to arrest Him. He answered by first asking for a coin. *"Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?"* The coins bore the image of Caesar. So Jesus said, *"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."* The things of the world are only temporal. Obey the authorities and give your temporal things. The allegiance of the heart is what is important. Give your heart, soul, mind and strength to God. In that answer, rich with wisdom, Jesus completely silenced them. He could have said, “Checkmate”! They were fighting over the temporal that did not matter in the long run. He was establishing a kingdom in the hearts of men that will last forever.

Dear reader, where is your focus? Are you concerned about where your coins go or to Whom your whole being belongs? It is amazing how Jesus can take our trick questions and turn them around to reveal the very motivations of our hearts.

Remember: When the world questions us, seek Godly wisdom through prayer before you answer.

**March 22 Morning**

Deuteronomy 5:21 *21 "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."*

Hello America! Lust will be our undoing. What God has given to another should cause you to be glad for them, not envious. Envy and selfishness are clear signals that we are walking in the flesh (our old nature). To desire to take your neighbor’s possession shows you have allowed your heart to become idolatrous (putting a thing before God). What follows is theft, adultery, working on your Sabbath, and ignoring God to get what your heart has fixed itself on.

Every day commercials bombard us with things to lust after. Advertisers always imply that the possession of the thing will bring you happiness. That has some truth. Things often do bring a shallow and temporal happiness. Things never affect the genuine joy of the heart. Satan said in Genesis 3:5, *"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* He promises way more than He delivers and never tells you the full price.

The Ten Commandments are almost doable until we get to this last one. The problem with man is “his “wanter” is broken”. We should be desiring the truth, things of God, and personal righteousness. Instead, we set our hearts on creation rather than the Creator.

Consider: Before you go after obtaining anything in life, whether a title, a possession, or a relationship, ask yourself if you expect this thing to bring you happiness. Is it a need or a lustful desire? Will the possession of this thing you seek glorify God or self?

**March 22 Evening**

Matthew 22:37-39 *37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*

A study of the Old Testament laws will show that all the Law is an expanding of these two instructions. All the laws pertaining to worship and the rituals of worship were about putting God first in one’s life. They looked forward to the promise of the miracle of salvation that God would work through the Messiah. The laws pertaining to health and justice were a practical way to express love to one’s neighbor. Without the Spirit of God indwelling men, the people of Israel needed these guidelines to live as closely as possible to what the Spirit would direct them. In the details of current events, they had the prophets that declared God’s specific will in given circumstances.

Now that the Spirit has been poured out, indwelling those who receive Christ, He guides us into all truth. What does it mean to love the Lord our God with our all in a given situation? The Spirit of God reveals that to us. He directs us into an expression of the love that pleases the heart of God and brings the kingdom of God into our lives and those with whom we interact. He is much more specific than the Law, and much more demanding than the 600 plus laws. Love has no loopholes.

He shows how to express love toward our neighbor. Jesus redefined the word “neighbor” to include anyone we come in contact with who has a need. The law may have had loopholes by which we could avoid a cost to self. The Spirit closes all those loopholes and directs us to a love like Jesus’ love that lays down our life for those in need. How in tune with the Spirit’s direction have you allowed your life to be? It is easy to make new laws of behavior that we suppose are based on New Testament principles and avoid the self-denying direction of the voice of the Spirit. Those who are led by the Spirit are the children of God (Romans 8:14). The only way to fulfill these two great laws is to be led of the Spirit.

Consider: What has the Spirit of God been directing me to do that I have been avoiding?

**March 23 Morning**

Deuteronomy 5:29 *29 Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!*

The church of the last century took a giant swing from preaching the fear of God to preaching the love of God. Both are important and both are needed. We need to see all of the character of God, as a focus on only one aspect is sure to get us off balance. When Jonathan Edwards preached his famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God*, the listeners had such a vision of hell that they clung to their pews for fear of falling in. Today we almost laugh at that image, but remember that people were coming to Christ and confessing their sins. When Moody began to be popular he preached along this same vein, until he heard a young evangelist preach on the love of God. He saw people accepting Christ and was upset. Then he began to realize what a wonderful drawing power the love of God has on man. *“We love Him because He first loved us.”* (1John 4:19) He saw it was true in the Scriptures. Gradually American preaching started to shift from hellfire and damnation to the love of God.

Neither emphasis is wrong, for both are true of the nature of God. God hates sin because it destroys us. He hates sin because it is contrary to who He is and because He is good. He is a just and righteous God that will give a just sentence to those who insistently rebel against His goodness. Hell is real and is perfect justice for all who will be sent there.

In today’s passage, we see again that God has good intentions for us. To disobey means to walk toward destruction and evil. That is why we need to fear the Holy One and heed His commands. We can love Him and fear Him when we realize His commands are out of concern and love for us, to keep us from the Destroyer.

Consider: Incline your heart to fear Him and keep His commands.

**March 23 Evening**

Matthew 23:5-8 *5 "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.' 8 "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers.*

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day had one motivating force, “what will men think of me?” Their religion was about pride in being the spiritual elite. They prayed in public with flowery words, distorted their faces when fasting, and publicly gave their tithes that were accurate down to the last mint leaf. They wore boxes that contained Scripture, which the Law encouraged, but they made extra-large. They believed the tassel of the Messiah’s garment would have the power to heal, so they made theirs extra-long as if to say, “Perhaps I am He.” Jesus said their reward for such effort was the respect of man. They had the titles, the best seats, and the places of honor. That is all.

Jesus taught His disciples that the way of the Pharisee was not to be their way.

They were to seek to please God not man. They were not to seek after the title, Rabbi, which means teacher. Why? There is only one Master. We are all on equal footing as brothers. We are all being taught by the Teacher, the Holy Spirit. Man so desires to have a king, a hero, an elevated figure to look to. We have one King, one Hero, one elevated One. When we get our eyes on a man, we are taking them off of Jesus. The Apostle Paul said to follow him (1Corinthians 11:1), but he is quick to add, “as I follow Christ”. Look past the leader to Jesus. If the leader is following closely in the footprints of the Leader, follow on.

This is not a word for us to judge others with, but to search our own hearts. Why am I acting as I do? Why do I want others to observe my actions? Would I do this if no one ever knew? Jesus encourages us to act in secret so that only our Father will see. Then our reward will be entirely from Him.

Consider: As you do things for the Lord, make every effort to see that no one knows. Keep it between you and God.

**March 24 Morning**

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 *4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

The Jewish people refer to this passage as the Shema (to hear). Jesus said it was the greatest of all the laws of God. He also said that all the Law could be summed up in this passage. First it tells us that YHWH (LORD in all caps) is our Elohim (plural for God in Hebrew). Then it tells us YHWH is one. Here we have the mystery of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are one. There is no difference amongst them. Religions with many gods distinguish the differences and purposes for each god, but the God of the Hebrews is one. We refer to that as monotheism. A perfect God can only be one. If any other were perfect, they would be the same.

Then we are commanded to love our YHWH our Elohim with all our heart. That is all our desire should be focused upon Him. In Hebrew, this word includes our thoughts. We should love our God with all our soul. That is all our will and emotions, our very life. We should love the LORD our God with all our strength. Our best and most diligent efforts should be exerted in glorifying Him out of love. It seems impossible to do one of these completely without combining all the other parts of our makeup. An abbreviated form of this command might be expressed as,

“love your God with all you are!”

As we focus on just what this is saying, we should get a sense of just how short we fall and of areas in our lives that are competing with the first place in our hearts. The Jews put this verse in a small container and put it on the entryway of their homes. When the orthodox Jews worship, they put it in a box on their foreheads. We should keep it before us always as a check on where our heart, soul and strength are being exerted.

Admonition: Do all to the glory of God.

**March 24 Evening**

Matthew 23:37-39 *37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.38 Look, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"*

Jesus presented Himself to Jerusalem on the Sunday in which the families of Israel selected their lamb for Passover sacrifice. He came into town on a donkey as the kings of Israel did when they were coming in peace. The crowds seemed to be receptive, welcoming Him, but Jesus wept and uttered the lament that is our passage for today. He saw that the people were seeking a military savior and not the spiritual Savior. He looked beyond the crowd who were caught up in the moment, and could see their next enthusiastic shouts would become “Crucify Him!” He looked even further into the future and saw the Roman army leveling the city and the Temple.

His heart was to save them from the destruction they were bringing on themselves, both physical and spiritual. The crowd did not have ears to hear or understand. We look back and wonder how they could be so dull in heart. How could they see the miracles and yet insist on their own agenda? Yet, we tend to live in the same pattern. Jesus comes to give us new life and we welcome it with shouts of “Hosanna!” Before long we are making decisions against our Savior. We are all of like nature. That is why Jesus made this journey to the cross. He came to deliver us from our nature, not simply from material difficulties or hardship.

He longs to gather us, too. What a beautiful picture! The mother hen sees the hawk and calls her chicks under her wings. She is willing to be the one that endures the talons to save her little ones. Won’t you run under the wings of Jesus? Those who reject His shelter now will one day see Him coming on the clouds in glory. Then, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is the Lord.

Consider: Why not bow the knee now? It is the only safe place to be.

**March 25 Morning**

Deuteronomy 6:10-12 *10 When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you--a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, 11 houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant--then when you eat and are satisfied, 12 be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*

There is a cycle in the history of man that emphasizes the importance of these verses. When societies and cultures do well and have time for leisure, they tend to become decadent. The old expression, “An idle mind is the Devil’s workshop” is only true because the heart of man is evil. Then as the culture becomes more and more vile, it is easily overthrown. God allows an enemy to put an end to the wickedness to turn the people back and stop the destructiveness of evil that is running unchecked.

In the verses today, God is warning His people that when they receive the blessings He has promised, they need to be careful not to forget the Giver of the blessings. Do not forget the One who delivered you from bondage. If we do, we end up back in bondage. He delivered us that we might love and serve Him, which is only right. He did not deliver us just so we could please ourselves. That is another form of bondage.

Where are you today? If you are in the midst of the blessing of God, enjoying the goodness of His blessings, be careful. Be a slave to nothing and no one but God. He is your Deliverer and the Giver of all good things. He enjoys giving you good things.

Consider: Thank Him for His goodness by keeping first things first.

**March 25 Evening**

Matthew 24:12-14 *12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come*.

Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 contain Jesus’ teaching on the last days. The disciples asked for information about two separate events. They asked when the buildings of Jerusalem would be torn down. They also lumped in a request for information about the end of the age. They thought these two events would coincide. The destruction of Jerusalem took place in 70 A.D., but the end of the age has not yet come. Jesus’ answer has an amazing overlap that speaks to both times just as many prophecies speak to both the first and second coming of Christ.

One of the clearest warnings is to be weary of false prophets and false messiahs. He taught that they would be able to deceive people, even displaying miraculous signs. He spoke of wars that would continue throughout this age, as well as famines and earthquakes. Then He gave a few specifics by which we can know the last generation has arrived. There will be a great increase in wickedness. Other passages call this the apostasy or falling away. Many will allow their (agape) love to grow cold. Only Christians truly exhibit “agape” love. The kingdom will be preached in the whole world. The abomination that causes desolation that Daniel wrote about will be set up in the Temple. I suppose that means the Temple in Jerusalem must be rebuilt first. These are the signs that the Lord gave us. He taught that this would be the beginning of a time of tribulation like the world has never seen.

In the years since Jesus’ ascension, there have been many times that the church has thought Christ’s return was at hand, but the signs had not all been fulfilled. We need not worry about the end of the world until these signs come to pass, but we should always live in such a way that we are ready to go from this life into eternity. Jesus’ prediction about the destruction of Jerusalem came to pass. This age of the Gospel being preached to mankind will come to an end. The time of the Gentiles is about up.

Consider: Our life here is about our preparation for entering into that next age. Are you getting ready?

**March 26 Morn**ing

Deuteronomy 6:23 *23 But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers.*

All through the wilderness wondering, the people complained that God had brought them out to let them die in the wilderness. Someone had their ear. Does someone have yours? God’s intention is to bring you out of the world to bring you into fellowship with Him. The Israelites feared they would never make it to the Promised Land. That was the worst of both worlds. They couldn’t enjoy Egypt nor could they enjoy the Promised Land. All they had was the Desert wandering. When they finally were ready to go in, they had such a lack of faith in God’s ability to conquer their enemies that they requested dying in the desert.

The Apostle Paul wrote that if we have no hope of resurrection, if all we have is here, eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. In other words, if this desert wandering is all we have, lets go back to Egypt. In today’s verse God declares that His whole purpose in bringing us out is to bring us in. It is not to take away pleasurable things. It is to give you real pleasures (Psalm 16:11).

God will finish the work He started when He first drew you to Himself. He will change you into His image (Romans 8:29). He will bring you into the Promised Land of unbroken fellowship with Him. We struggle with all the distractions of life and wonder if we will ever get there. He brought you out to bring you in! Don’t get comfortable in this desert, pilgrim.

Meditation: He has brought you out to bring you in. Are you entering in?

**March 26 Evening**

Matthew 24:37-39 *37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.*

Jesus taught that His return would not be in secret. He said it would be more like lightening shining in the east and visible in the west. The prophet Zechariah details some of the earth shaking things that will happen at that moment. Then Jesus warned that no one in heaven or earth knew when that would be. He said that only the Father knew. He gave us signs to look for (see yesterday’s evening devotion).

Yet, He taught that it will be a shock to everyone.

Jesus compares His Second Coming to the great flood in the days of Noah.

Noah built that ark over a long period of time as he preached to the people (2 Peter 2:5). Yet, the people did not listen or even consider that their world was about to end. They were doing the things that people normally do. If you knew the world was about to end, you wouldn’t stop to eat, drink, or marry. The last moments would be too precious. Jesus said they knew nothing about what would happen until it came to pass. How could they hear Noah’s preaching and see the great boat and yet know nothing? There is none so blind as those who will not see.

Jesus has given us signs to look for. When they come to pass, only the righteous will take it to heart and be prepared. Jesus is the great ark. Only those in Him will be ready for the flood that is to come upon the earth. If any man has ears to hear, let him hear (Matthew 11:15). The world will be going about its self-gratifying ways when destruction comes upon it. Though the message is preached and the warnings are given, only those that are willing will hear. The cares and pleasures of life can deaden our ears to the truth that is preached to us.

Consider: Are your ears willing to hear?

**March 27 Morning**

Deuteronomy 7:2 *2 and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy.*

Many people stumble at this portion of Scripture. It is amazing how modern “science” justifies the brutality of some cultures and condemns Christian history as un-Christian. If a culture is faithful to its beliefs, though those beliefs slaughter innocents and destroy indiscriminately, we are told we just don’t understand their culture. But when power mongers live in disregard to Christian principles, yet operate in the name of Christ, it is condemned as Christianity’s dark side.

Look at any culture today that does not have a Christian heritage and ask yourself if you would honestly want to live there. Yet, few educators will acknowledge the wonderful blessing faith in Christ has brought to the world. The problem is not intellectual. It is moral.

The passage today is often cited as an example of the brutality of the Old Testament God. What is ignored is that the Children of Israel were in Egypt 400 years while the cup of iniquity of these people was filling up. They had the truth during the time of Melchizedek, at the beginning of that 400 year period, but they turned from it and became increasingly wicked. By the time Israel entered the land, the people there were slaughtering babies by the thousands to their god Moleck, burning them alive. (12:31) The other god they worshipped, Baal, included self-mutilation and perverse sexual practices in public worship. When cultures become that evil, life becomes unbearable and filled with misery and disease. It was God’s mercy to command (and only the Creator has the right to) that those cultures be wiped out. They were influencing the world for evil, and God was replacing them with Israel to influence the world for good.

Consider: Education’s perspective changes yearly. God’s Word never changes.

**March 27 Evening**

Matthew 25:8-10 *8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'9 "'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' 10 "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.*

During the week before the crucifixion, Jesus told several parables about His return to the earth. Our passage today is from the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. Five had brought plenty of oil. Five did not bring enough to last until the groom came for them. While they were waiting the foolish virgins ran out of oil. They asked the wise virgins to share their oil, but they sent them to buy more for themselves. While they were away buying oil the groom came. The five wise were let into the marriage banquet and the others were locked out. When they knocked on the door, the groom replied that he did not know them.

The expression of not knowing someone is found earlier when some tried to enter heaven (Matthew 7:22-23). In that passage, Jesus says they never fed, clothed or visited Him in jail. He was referring to things done to the least of His brothers as being the same as doing it to Him. Comparing these two teachings we could relate the oil to a life yielded to the Holy Spirit. He is the One who sheds light upon our path. The Scripture makes the simile of oil and the Holy Spirit. Some lives are so yielded to the Spirit that they serve God continually without even consciously being aware of it. Their thoughts are set upon the desire of the Spirit and controlled by the Spirit (Romans 8:5-6). You can’t give that to someone. Each of us must individually seek that from God.

Many of the parables of the return of Christ imply that He will come at a time that no one suspects. Many will be taken off guard, while others will be waiting expectantly. Are you waiting? Is your life full of oil? Continue to ask for more of your life to be filled with the Holy Spirit, available to serve others at His leading.

Consider: Whether we live to see His Second Coming or die before that event, we should live every day as if it were our last.

**March 28 Morning**

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 *7 The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.8 But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

Why does the LORD set His love on certain ones? In the case of Israel, we see that He simply chose to love them, and it was in keeping with the oath He made to their forefathers. That oath began with the man of faith, Abraham. Our relationship with God can affect future generations that follow us.

God chose to love the world. He sets His love upon all who by faith receive what Jesus did for them. The result of Jesus’ life of obedience is like that of Abraham, but it is the ultimate fulfillment of the foreshadow, Abraham. We, too, were delivered from the land of slavery, slavery to our old nature. We, too, are delivered from the master of this world, Satan. He no longer has a claim to our lives. He has no right to our souls. God made a promise to crush the head of Satan so that we could be redeemed and out from under the power of the enemy.

This verse applies to us today. God has set His affection on you and chosen you. Thank Jesus for making that possible. Live in the knowledge of the truth that God has set His affection on you because of Jesus’ life of faith and death in your place.

Consider: You are delivered from the power of the enemy. Don’t let him tell you anything else. You are loved, and you are free!

**March 28 Evening**

Matthew 25:26, 28-29 *26 "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?*

*28 "'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.29 For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.*

Jesus told His disciples several parables to prepare them for His departure. The parable of the talents is one of the most memorable. The word ‘talent’ is a measure of silver or gold. We often confuse it with the common word for man’s gifting or ability. That may be one of the things Jesus was referring to. Each man was given a different amount according to their ability. This is where the word we use for talent comes in. The master gave those with financial smarts, talent for investing, more money to invest. Then he left for a journey.

The more talented men doubled their master’s money, but the man who was given the least, buried it and gave the master back what was given to him. The master used the man’s own words to condemn him. The indictment is wickedness and laziness. The servant was wicked because the master had trusted him to do something. Just investing it at a bank would have at least done something. He is lazy because he made no effort to increase what the master gave him. What he had was taken away and given to the man that had the most.

What is it that we have to invest? I don’t think Jesus is referring only to natural ability, but also that which He has given us of Himself. He invests in us the one thing that is really of value, His Spirit. The more we function at the leading of the Spirit, the more fruitful we are. The Spirit in us bears fruit when we let Him lead us. The more we allow Him to lead, the more of our life is filled with His presence. The man who did nothing is all too common in our Christian world. We will be indicted as wicked and lazy if we bury the Spirit within us and do nothing to see His increasing possession of our lives.

Consider: If you want an increase of the Spirit in your life, let Him have His way in your life today.

**March 29 Morning**

Deuteronomy 8:3-4 *3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.4 Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years.*

God tested Israel in the wilderness in order to know what was in their heart. It was not as if our all-knowing God couldn’t see their hearts. They needed to see how faithless and proud their own hearts were. So do we! Because of our sinful nature we get the ridiculous idea that we are independent creatures. We think we can take care of ourselves. That is why we are taken through wilderness experiences.

When the LORD sets his love upon you, the most gracious thing He can do for you is to show you truth. The truth is that you are a dependent creature, dependent upon the word of God for air, water, food, ability, and life itself. God alone is ascient (self-sustaining). How do you think Moses survived two forty-day fasts without water? The Word of God sustained him. How could the nation of Israel live for 40 years in a desert? The Word of God brought water from the rock, bread from the sky, and kept their clothing from wearing out.

When we realize this fact of total dependency, we are humbled. Jesus knew it to be true. He said, “I can do nothing by myself.” As a man, He knew He had become dependent on the Word of His Father, and so He spoke and acted what He heard and saw of the Father. The effects of the humbling truth that we are totally dependent on the Word of God should change the way we speak and act if we are to accomplish anything of lasting value. Recognize the reality of how needy you are.

Consider: The trials of life are to humble us and show us our need.

**March 29 Evening**

Matthew 25:38-40 *38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

At the final judgment, every man will appear before the King to give an account of the things done during their life. The Son of Man will divide them into just two groups. He doesn’t ask them about theology. There are no quizzes. The deciding factor is how they lived. Did they meet the needs of their fellow man? Or did they ignore the pain and suffering around them? One might argue that the only way a person is willing to give of themselves out of unselfish motives is that the Spirit of Christ indwells them. Indeed, these who did meet the needs of others seem to be unaware that they did so. They did not boast about all the good things they had done, but instead asked when they did them.

Notice, also, that Jesus says they did it to Him. They asked how that could possibly be, and He explained that doing it to one of the least of His brothers is the same as doing it to Him. This reminds us of the Good Samaritan story.

I once asked the Lord how I could wash His feet. He showed me that washing the feet of His children was the same as doing it to Him. As I proceeded to do so, the realization that I was washing Jesus’ feet on my brother overwhelmed me. Can we see our brothers’ need as Jesus’ need?

There is a story about three priests whose church was in continual decline. They asked a traveling Jewish rabbi if he had any ideas. The rabbi told them that he had heard Jesus was among them. Each of the priests suspected it was one of the other priests. They began to treat one another as if they were Christ. They began to prefer each other with great respect. The congregation began to grow again and its fame spread throughout the country. It is just a story, but it contains a great truth. Jesus lives in our brothers.

Remember: Let us treat one another as we would treat Jesus. He’ll honor that. His life in us makes that possible.

**March 30 Morning**

Deuteronomy 8:5 *5 Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.*

The word ‘discipline’ means ‘to teach’. God is always trying to teach His children. The previous verses in yesterday’s devotion showed us that trials in life teach us of our dependency on His Word. The lesson is humility. The teaching method is needed.

In this verse, we are told about the heart of the teacher. He has a father’s heart.

No wonder Jesus called God ‘Daddy’ (Abba). The word of God tells us that even

Jesus learned through the things He suffered. If Father God would take His beloved Son, Jesus, through difficulty to teach Him, then how much more do we need it?

We often pray to be delivered from illness, to escape a trial, to be rescued from situations, and we should look to God when we are in trouble. The lesson we see in the wilderness wanderings of Israel, is that of attitude toward the test. Israel often failed by murmuring about the test instead of learning the lesson God was trying to teach, the lessons of humility and dependency.

What will you do when the next trial comes your way? What should be your response? Some demand that God remove the test, the teaching tool, without learning or even acknowledging the lesson. Others run to man to find a solution and refuse to acknowledge the test comes from a loving Father.

Consider: First, see the source. Then find the lesson that needs to be learned. Thank your Father for His loving discipline, and learn.

**March 30 Evening**

Matthew 26:7, 12-13 *7 a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. 12 When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 13 I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."*

This is extravagant worship! The woman was so blessed by the words of Christ that she took something as valuable as a year’s wages and poured it out on Jesus’ head (Mark 14:5). Whether she consciously knew that Jesus was about to be crucified for her sins or not, we cannot tell, but Jesus said she did it to prepare Him for burial. She was moved to make this costly action and did not allow her mind to keep her from it. How many times are we moved to do something that seems excessive, but we allow our reasoning to justify not following through? The carnal mind is often at odds with the Spirit.

Extravagant worship is almost always criticized by reasoning people. Someone will always suggest a better use for the time or the money. Some that were present suggested it could have been sold and given to the poor. Jesus cut short their petty bickering by telling them that the poor are always there, and they can give to help them at any time. He was not going to be with them much longer. If our action is at the leading of the Holy Spirit, we may never know the far reaching effects or His real purpose. There would be no time to anoint Jesus’ body before His burial. The women came to do it on resurrection morning, but somehow, the woman in our text today was moved to do it beforehand.

The fact that you are reading this today is proof that Jesus’ words have come to pass. This woman set an example for us all of loving Jesus with all her heart, soul, mind, and strength. She doesn’t rank very high with historians, and we aren’t really sure who she was. (Some think she was Mary, Lazarus’ sister. See John 11:2.) But she rates pretty high in the hall of fame of the faithful for this extravagant act of worship.

Consider: Are you an extravagant worshipper?

**March 31 Morning**

Deuteronomy 9:6 *6 Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.*

Need some humble pie? Try this verse! We get things backward today, thinking we have been so good that God has to bless us. Wrong! All our righteousness is like filthy rags. If we were not blessed, we would be whining complaining, and possibly even forsaking God. He only gives us what we can bear, and for some of us that is not very much. They are mature souls, those that have a heart to learn from God, that endure many trials. The more willing you are to learn, the more difficulty comes your way to teach you. Along with the difficulty comes great grace.

Never get to thinking the blessings are because of your goodness. If there is any goodness in your life, it is from the working of the Holy Spirit, the goodness of God. Now, if you should yield to His Spirit, and learn and grow so that you demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit, does God owe you blessings? No way! That is merely your duty, your responsibility as a creature. God owes you nothing. If He chooses to bless you it is either because you need a break before more instruction comes your way, or you are just too wimpy to take anything else.

Stiff-necked, what an expression! When God calls, our heads do not turn. We go our own way ignoring Him. This is the nature of fallen man.

Consider: Thank God for every blessing and realize it comes from His generous Spirit. Thank Him for the trials too, because they come from the same Spirit.

**March 31 Evening**

Matthew 26:27-29 *27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."*

At the Last Supper, Jesus did something out of the norm for the traditional Seder of the day. The traditional meal had four cups of wine. Each has a name and spiritual significance. The cup that Jesus was presenting in our text above was the Cup of Redemption. In the past, it had reminded the people of the blood of the lambs that marked the doorposts in Egypt. The destroying angel saw the marked doors and passed over them. Instead of the regular phrases that were repeated here, He told them the cup was about His blood! Some manuscripts include the word ‘new’ before ‘covenant’. In 1Corinthians 11, Paul quoted it with the words ‘new covenant’. What did Jesus mean?

The old covenant was the covenant made on Mount Sinai. It was made with the blood of animals and dependent on the rules being kept. The prophets told of a day when God would make a new covenant. God promised to make one that was not written on stone tablets but written on the transformed heart of the recipient. That day had come.

There is another nuance here that we would only catch if we were familiar with traditions of the day. The wording is very much like a proposal for marriage. A groom would present a cup of wine to a prospective bride and propose a covenant of relationship with her. If she took it and drank it all, it meant she received his life and would give him her life as well.

One of the dearest expressions of all is the last verse. Wine was a symbol of joy and celebration. Jesus said He would not drink it again until He drank it anew with us in the Father’s kingdom. We long to be with Him, but this expression tells us how He longs to be with us. That should reveal to our hearts His great love for us.

Remember: The next time you have communion, remember the meaning behind these rich symbols and words.

**April 1 Morning**

Deuteronomy 10:9 ***9*** *That is why the Levites have no share or inheritance among their brothers; the LORD is their inheritance, as the LORD your God told them.)*

When the Promise Land was portioned out to the sons of Israel, the tribe of Levy did not get its own area. Instead, they had cities within the other tribes’ lands so that they could be priests among them. It is a wonderful picture for us today. We are to be priests (1Peter 2:5) in the world, but not of the world. We have here no continuing city. Like Abraham, we look for the city that has lasting foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10).

The failure of the tribe of Levi to really be priests was a factor in the downfall of some of the tribes. The tribe of Dan went into idolatry because the priest they chose was using idols. Our faithfulness in our relationship with God and worship of God will affect many lives. The call of God on our lives is not just for our own spiritual wellbeing, but for many.

The LORD emphasized that the Levites were not to be attached to the land as their inheritance, but to the LORD himself. He would be their inheritance. Which would you rather have? The answer shows where your heart is. Priests of God (all redeemed believers) must set their heart and mind on things above. Our desire must be toward our relationship with God, to inherit the LORD Himself, not the things that He has made. That is the heart of faith that results in a life of faith. The Levites were only a twelfth of the nation. They had a high calling. So do you.

Consider: What do you desire to inherit?

**April 1 Evening**

Matthew 26:33-35 *33 Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." 34 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." 35 But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.*

I think we would say the same. Those in the third world that are daily faced with suffering and death are not so quick to say the same. Like Peter, they have learned that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. We can believe in our heart that we would die before denying our Lord, but the truth is that we will never know unless we are faced with the choice. In many parts of our world, people are making the choice. Let’s remember to pray for them. There are more martyrs for Christ this century than in all previous ones combined.

We have one great resource that the disciples did not yet have. The Spirit has been poured out. If we are living in constant reliance upon the Spirit, when faced with a choice, we will follow our life-pattern of depending on His strength. We will make the right choice. If we are live in the pattern of relying on our own strength and effort, we will certainly fail the test. Failing does not mean defeat. It is a revelation of our condition and the unreliability of the flesh. That revelation will bring us to the depths of despair, the depths to which Peter went when he went out and wept bitterly. Then we can turn and change the source of our strength.

The humility of failure made it possible for him to hear the Apostle Paul’s correction (Galatians 2:14). Peter did change the source of his strength. When faced again with a choice of denying Jesus or death, he not only chose death, but death upside down on a cross. You probably stand before a great test in which you will fail, or have failed, or have been restored. Learn the lesson of failure, and let it teach you humility and dependence on the strength of the Spirit.

Remember: God does not love us any less when we fail. Get up! Trust Him!

**April 2 Morning**

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 *12 And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?*

God only asks us that which is for our own good. In this passage, He asks us five things for our good. The first is to fear the LORD our God. The fear of the LORD causes us to distance ourselves from evil. To fear God means to know He is just and will punish all rebellion against His goodness.

Then He asks us to walk in His ways. What are the ways of God? His attributes define the ways of God: justice, mercy, truth, righteousness, grace, love, holiness, and goodness. When we walk in His ways, we are in His likeness. Walking in His ways has lasting results. It’s the best for us and for those whom we come in contact.

Next is to love Him. We love Him because He first loved us (1John 4:19). When that is done, all is done. To love Him means the other instructions are carried out as well. God wants a living relationship with you, not just obedience to rituals.

Fourth is to serve the LORD our God with all our heart and soul. If we love Him we will want to express that love. Love that is not expressed in service is insincere. Does your wholehearted service express your love relationship with God? Last is to observe His commands. It’s not because God is a dictator, but because His commands are instructions of love that show you the best way to go. The two great commands are to love God with our all, and our neighbor as our self.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to fear You. Help me walk in Your ways. Increase my love for You so that I gladly serve and obey You.

**April 2 Evening**

Matthew 26:39-41 *39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." 40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. 41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."*

Gethsemane means “olive press.” Jesus had retreated to what we believe was a friend’s olive grove. The cave where the press was kept is still there today. The Church of All Nations is built over the spot where it is believed Jesus went to pray. Ancient olive trees still grow in the garden beside the church. Jesus came to prepare Himself for the battle that lay before Him. He had never felt the weight of sin personally. For all eternity He had perfect fellowship with the Father. Ahead, He could see the sins of the world would be placed upon Him while all hell vented its fury at Him. The Father would have to turn His face, for God is of purer eyes than to behold evil. “Isn’t there some other way?” He asked.

Jesus’ will was to not suffer. That is not a sin. That is instinctive. Yet, He was willing to suffer if it was the Father’s will. Reader, don’t feel that you have sinned if you do not desire loss or pain that lies before you. As long as the Father’s will is your priority and you are willing to do His will, even if you do not desire the pain, you are not in sin. You don’t have to like God’s will. You do need to have faith that He will see you through and bring good from the suffering. That is faith in the character and sovereignty of God.

Jesus asked the disciples to pray with Him. He wanted His friends to be prepared too. He asked them to pray for their own sakes. When God prompts you to pray, it is sometimes the preparation for the battle that lies before you. They wanted to pray, but their bodies were tired. As you pray for others, don’t forget to pray for your dependence on the Spirit of God for strength.

Consider: Can you keep watch with Him for one hour?

**April 3 Morning**

Deuteronomy 10:15-16 15 *Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today.16 Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer*.

I love this expression, *“set his affection”*. Not only has God set His affection on our forefathers in the faith, but He has set His affection on us. It was not anything good that we did. He sovereignly chose to set His affection on you! He loved you and chose you. So what should be your response?

Circumcise your hearts. Abraham had been given the ritual of circumcision confirming the covenant between God and himself. It was a physical illustration of an inner transformation that was to take place. This transformation is an act God is requesting us to do. “Make your heart tender toward me,” God asks us. “Don’t act like you don’t hear when I call.”

If we allow our hearts to be tender toward God, one word from Him and we will be at His feet waiting to hear what He has to speak to us. “Samuel, Samuel,” God called out. Little Samuel had a circumcised heart. He heard. He responded. When God calls your name do you respond? Do you even hear Him call?

Once we have received His affection set upon us, realized His love and calling to us, we must respond by making our heart tender toward Him. We must respond by yielding our ear, by being quick to hear and respond. We can no longer go the way of our own choosing.

Meditation: God set His heart on me. What is my response?

**April 3 Evening**

Matthew 26:62-64 *62 Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" 63 But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."*

The political power plays that happened that night are an indication of the heart of those in leadership. They took Jesus to Annas first. He was Caiaphas father-in-law. He had been High Priest years before but still pulled the strings. He was interested in finding out who was a secret follower amongst the Jewish leaders. Jesus would not betray them and kept silent. Then the kangaroo court began. The High Priest was not supposed to conduct a trial before the morning sacrifice, but here in the wee hours of the morning, Jesus is being tried. They try to line up men of questionable character to be witnesses, because Judas didn’t show up. These men were ready to condemn him, they just weren’t smart enough to say the same thing.

Finally, Caiaphas used The Oath of Testimony. This was his ace in the hole. He could command a person to answer a question truthfully by authority of his position. A false answer would condemn the person before God. “Are you the Messiah of God?” he asked. Jesus answered with a verse from Daniel 7:13. All through His ministry He called Himself the Son of Man. In the Daniel passage the Son of Man is led into the presence of the Ancient of Days (God), and comes with the clouds. In that one passage we have the ascension and the Second Coming.

Every eye will see that final event.

In emotional fury, Caiaphas broke the Law again by ripping the priestly robe, but the Law is not his chief concern. He had what he needed. Now he could order the execution through his influence with the Roman leader. The man who exposed his whole system and hypocritical ways, the man who drew the crowds, would be out of the way. There is one problem. Though Caiaphas did not believe the passage Jesus quoted, it came to pass and will come to pass. Jesus ascended to the Father.

He will return on the clouds in glory. Caiaphas won the skirmish and lost the battle. His knee will bow, and his tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord of all.

Consider: Just as the ascension took place, so the last part of the promise, the Second Coming, will take place.

**April 4 Morning**

Deuteronomy 11:13-14 *13 So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today--to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul--14 then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil.*

Many of the promises of God are conditional. There is an “if you…” and a “then I will…” In this passage God tells the Children of Israel that their economy is dependent on their obedience. God did give them certain laws that would make their agrarian lifestyle more productive. He also brought them to a land that was dependent on seasonal rains. Farmers throughout the ages have had to depend on the Weather Maker. It was an incentive to obey God. When they turned from God and had drought, they tried other gods that claimed to bring rain, like Baal.

At the moment of writing this, the place I am living is experiencing extreme drought. The government of the area recently repealed what they called ‘antiquated laws’, laws that had to do with sexual morality. “Those came from the Bible and we don’t all believe in the Bible anymore,” they say. But that is not true. All western law is Biblically based. Society has just chosen to pick and choose the laws they will enforce. That does not change the promises of God.

In this drought with devastating forest fires, I have not heard one person say there is a need for us to repent. I hear, “Pray for rain.” That is general enough so as to offend no one. We have forgotten that God is the Weather Maker, and that many of His promises are conditional.

Consider: Difficulty can be an expression of grace to turn us back to God.

**April 4 Evening**

Matthew 27:17, 21-22 *17 So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"*

*21 "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor.*

*"Barabbas," they answered. 22 "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called*

*Christ?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!"*

It hadn’t been that many days before this event that the people were shouting for Jesus to save them, save them from Rome. That week was spent sharing the words of life with all who would hear in the Temple. They had come to a crossroad. Would they ask for the release of Barabbas, the zealot that killed Roman soldiers, or Jesus, the healer and teacher? Will they choose the physical answer to their needs, or the spiritual answer? Will they choose the way of the flesh or the way of the Spirit? “They all answered, "Crucify him!"

We are often faced with the same choice. We have to decide whether we will proceed with our lives on the basis of what man can accomplish, or take a whole new path led by the Spirit of God. Will we choose the physical answer to our needs or the spiritual answer, the way of the flesh or the way of the Spirit? One is death, and the other is life.

Pilate did not have just cause to execute Jesus and told the crowd as much. They didn’t care. They said they would personally bear the guilt. “His blood be on us and our children.” We look back at the history of suffering the Jews have endured and wonder at the connection with their readiness to accept the blame for His murder.

We trust that in God’s time that expression will mean their salvation.

Pilate had Jesus whipped. It was a process they called ‘half death’. Those who wielded the whips were medically trained to recognize shock. They wove into the end of the whips pieces of bone or lead so that the muscles of the back would be shredded. It was so brutal that sometimes the organs were exposed. Those wielding the whips were not held responsible should the victim die. Isaiah predicted, “By His stripes we are healed.”

Prayer: Thank you Lord, for enduring that for us!

**April 5 Morning**

Deuteronomy 11:18-19 *18 Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*

The Jews took this quite literally. Even today at the Western Wall you can see Jewish men fix the Scripture Boxes (phylacteries) to their foreheads and wrap their arms. Almost every Jewish home has a Scripture container on the doorframe.

There was a time in the USA when people included portions of Scripture in their daily conversation. The Bible was read daily by many, and many of our old sayings come from Scripture. That trend has all but died out. We rarely speak in the expressions of the Bible, and are even mocked when we quote Scripture. That shouldn’t bother us though. The Word of God is powerful and living and will accomplish God’s purposes. If we speak the Scripture that God lays on our heart during a conversation, it will surely do its work.

For the Holy Spirit to bring it to memory, we should be reading it daily. We should be taking unhurried time to dwell on a passage. We should be memorizing it. Then it can be brought to our minds to be effective for us and for those with whom we communicate.

We have a duty to model this for our children, and teach them to do the same. The passage here is a good pointer for morning and evening devotions. The Word should start and end our day. It should also be a topic during the day.

Consider: How far are you from God’s request? What changes are needed?

**April 5 Evening**

Matthew 27:28-30 *28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. 30 They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.*

Once the Roman governor, Pilate, pronounced the sentence, the soldiers had their fun with Jesus. I’m sure they would rather have worked over Barabbas, the zealot, but this Jewish teacher would have to do. The charge was that He claimed to be king, so the put a robe of regal red on him and made Him a crown out of thorns. The plant they most likely used is called “Crown of Thorns” today. Its spikes are two to three inches in length. As the first couple were being expelled from the Garden of Eden, God told Adam that thorns would come up from the ground, making his efforts to till the soil difficult. In our passage today, the second Adam is taking the curse of the thorns on His head. He is taking the curse of sin upon Himself that we might be free of it.

Jesus had already been beaten and spit upon by the religious leaders. Now it was the secular government’s turn. After the scourging He would have had no strength to resist. They put a stick in His hand pretending it to be a staff of authority and bowed in mockery. Then they would wrench the stick from Him and beat Him over the head again and again. This is the Lord of glory that formed them and gave them life. He knows their lineage back to Adam. He knows the number of hairs on their heads. He is about to pay for their sins with His own death that they might have a chance to truly live. When the soldiers had grown tired of their game of mockery, they placed a beam across His torn shoulders and tied His arms to it. A rope was probably placed about His waist, with a soldier at the other end, leading Him to the place of execution, as one would lead an animal.

We wonder how man can be so cold, so heartless. Jesus would soon say they did not know what they were doing. If Jesus can overlook such abuse, knowing that man is ignorant, how much more should we overlook words and actions that offend us? He did nothing to deserve the abuse. Many times, we have. He has been so gracious as to forgive our ignorance. Let us forgive others for theirs.

Prayer: Take a moment to thank Him again for enduring this abuse for you.

**April 6 Morning**

Deuteronomy 11:26-28 *26 See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse--27 the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; 28 the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.*

Recently, the Prayer of Jabez has become quite popular (1 Chronicles 4:10). It is a wonderful prayer that asks for the Lord to change the circumstances in which we find ourselves into blessings. We do need to remember that most blessings are contingent upon obedience. As New Testament saints, we emphasize grace, but that does not change the principle of these verses. We still reap what we sow. We cannot ask for blessing while walking in disobedience and expect God to wink at our disobedience.

The choice to obey is clearly laid before us. Instead of the many rules of the Old Testament Law, we have the leading of the Holy Spirit that indwells us. We choose to obey or disobey. We choose curse or blessing. It is sad that we think we can pray for God to remove this righteous principle. It is there to deter us from evil and guide us into life.

What are these other gods? They are ones that promise prosperity in spite of disobedience. They are lies that say that the pleasure of sin is more than momentary. They offer an alternative to the cut and dried choice of obedience and blessing or disobedience and curse. They lie! They are disobedience and a curse in disguise.

Meditation: Obedience brings the blessing of God!

**April 6 Evening**

Matthew 27:45-46 *45 From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. 46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"--which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

Jesus was crucified around the time of the morning sacrifice, 9 A.M. At noon there was a strange darkness. It lasted until the afternoon sacrifice, 3 P.M. It is reminiscent of the plague of darkness that covered the land of Egypt. In the area that Israel lived, there was light, but the rest of Egypt was covered with a thick darkness. God is light. In Him is no darkness at all. Was hell unleashed upon the Savior in those three hours because our sins were laid upon Him?

Toward the end of the three hours, Jesus cried out in a loud voice the beginning of Psalm 22. It is not likely that He could have said the whole phrase at once. Each painful breath had to be drawn while pulling against the nails in His wrists and pushing against those in His ankles. These few words had to say volumes. In that psalm, David prophesied the very details of what was taking place. He predicted Jesus’ anguish, His thirst, the lots cast for His clothing, and even the nails in His hands and feet. Many have taken this to be a voice of despair. I see it more as a battle cry against the darkness. Read the rest of the psalm and you will see Jesus’ thoughts are toward the victory He is achieving for those He loves. He was turning His disciples’ minds to the Word of God. It was one way, with the limited strength He had left, that He could explain that this was all predicted and would end in a glorious outcome.

I encourage you to read the whole psalm to understand the fullness of where

Jesus was turning their minds. Here are the last two verses. Psalms 22:30-31 *30 Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. 31 They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn-- for he has done it.*

Consider: He has done it, for you and me! We are a part of those future generations declaring the victory won on the cross.

**April 7 Morning**

Deuteronomy 12:5, 8 *5 But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; 8 You are not to do as we do here today, everyone as he sees fit...*

Where has the Lord placed His name today? It is on you, Christian. There are many in the body of Christ who do as they see fit. Instead of joining together with those upon whom God has placed His name, they worship alone. It is much easier to worship alone, to not join with a body of believers. People create problems. The thing we must realize is, I am one! I am part of the problem. Isolating myself will not help. The problems arise when we worship together because we are not yet perfect. Those problems are there so that I may learn and grow. They give me the opportunity to be gracious and demonstrate love and mercy. The problems demonstrate my weaknesses and need for continued growth and fellowship.

It is much more comfortable to not be shown my weaknesses through conflict with my brothers and sisters. It is easier to not have to demonstrate mercy and grace. Remember, though, that Jesus said the world would know we are Christians by our love. This love shows the life of Christ when it forgives and is gracious in the face of offenses, not when everyone just gets along.

So it is your choice, Christian. You can do as the LORD has directed us in not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together or go the easy route. The easy route is doing as you see fit. The friction in the body is the grinding of the living stones so that they fit into place in the Temple of God.

Consider: Are you willing to endure friction that you might be changed?

**April 7 Evening**

Matthew 27:50-52 *50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. 52 The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.*

Luke records this last cry to be, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” John says the last cry was, “It is finished!” We assume that Luke obtained his version from Mary. John was right there at the foot of the cross. Surely Jesus said both expressions. The Greek word translated in John, “It is finished”, is one word in Greek. It was stamped on Roman invoices when a bill was paid. We use the phrase, “paid in full.” The sin debt of mankind was paid in full. The redemption price of the slaves of sin was paid in full. That was a shout of victory. He had done what He came to do. The just One had taken on the sins of the unjust and died in their place.

The overflow of the power of that moment affected the physical world. The most significant event was the tearing of the veil. Between the court where the priests ministered to God and the innermost court where God’s glory resided, hung a huge curtain. It is estimated to have been three to five inches thick. Once a year a priest was selected to go in and sprinkle the blood of atonement over the mercy seat and ask for forgiveness of the sins of the nation. The tearing of that curtain meant access to God was open to all. Now, all people can come to God, not with the blood of an animal, but with the atoning blood of the Lamb of God who died for them. We have access to God!

Matthew is the only one that mentions tombs opening and holy people rising from the dead. Now that is an overflow of power! The Roman soldier that was witnessing all these miraculous events, and the unique words and ways of the One he helped crucify, could not help but exclaim, *"Surely he was the Son of God!"* (verse 54). Remember that there is evidence that Matthew was written within 20 years of Jesus’ death, at the latest. Witnesses to these events were still living when Matthew began to be circulated. These things actually happened.

Consider what great things God has done for you!

**April 8 Morning**

Deuteronomy 15:1, 7-8 *1 At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts.*

*7 If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother.8 Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs.*

The Jewish faith was intensely practical. Anyone may fall on hard times and need assistance. This was to be a nation where everyone generously helped one another. The Kingdom of God is such a place. If you have extra, it is to share with those who have a need so that you both will be blessed. If he can’t repay after a period of time, forgive the debt. Don’t hold it against him.

Is it more blessed to give than receive? It is, but only if you can do it with a generous spirit thanking the Lord. The Law put them under compulsion to do this, and at many times in Israel’s history they disregarded the Law. The Spirit puts us under compulsion too, but asks us to have a willing heart. All we need to do is yield to the Spirit. He will give us a generous heart that is the heart of our Lord.

Is there a person in your fellowship with a need? Lend freely in an openhanded way. Our New Testament faith should be very practical also. The world should see a testimony of how we care for one another. If you’ve done it to your brother, you have done it to Christ.

Pray: Lord, give me a generous spirit like yours. Help me desire treasures in heaven more than treasure upon the earth.

**April 8 Evening**

Matthew 28:5-7 *5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."*

The morning after the Sabbath, the women came to the tomb where Jesus was laid to anoint His body with perfumes. An angel had rolled the stone away from the entrance of the tomb. He did not roll it away to let Jesus out, but so that they could go in and see that Jesus was not there. He greeted them with the common angelic greeting, “Do not be afraid”. When we encounter the supernatural forces of God, they almost always give this salutation for our sake. Jesus will say the same thing again when He greets the women shortly after this.

Then the declaration of the ages was made. *“He is not here; He has risen, just as He said.”* The women were invited in to see for themselves, as if the word of the angel was not sufficient. The grave could not hold Jesus. Death could not hold Him. His sacrifice for our sins was accepted by the Father, and He defeated death itself. The saying has been fulfilled, *"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?”* Hosea 13:14a

Jesus is the firstfruits from among the dead. He rose and ascended to God as a sign that we will do the same. He did not conquer death for Himself alone, but for all who will believe in Him. The resurrection has been scrutinized and attacked more than any other Bible doctrine, because it makes or breaks Christianity. If Jesus is not raised, we are still in our sins and our faith is in vain. (1Corinthians 15:17) But if it is true, our eternity hinges upon our relationship with the Victor. Is your eternity secure?

Consider: Are you sure you will be a part of the great harvest? If not, place your faith and hope in Him right now! If you are sure, then thank Him for this victory that He won for you, and live your life in the light of it.

**April 9 Morning**

Deuteronomy 17:18-20a *18 When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. 19 It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees 20 and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left.*

God did not intend for the people to choose a king, but He knew they would.

That is why He gave them guidelines for this king to follow. The first was that the LORD pick the man, not the people. There were other guidelines for the king, but the one quoted above stands out. The king was to have a personal copy of the Law. In other words, he needs to have his own copy of the Bible. It is supposed to be with him, not just somewhere in the palace. It is to be read every day by the king.

The reason God asks for this to be done is spelled out for us. It is so the king will revere God. When we read of God’s instruction, of His character, of His awesome works, we should respond with reverence for God. How was the king to lead His people in the ways of God if he did not read them himself? He was not to consider himself above the law, but subject to it like everyone else.

God has made us kings and priest to our Himself. (Rev 1:6) Since God calls us kings, we need to do the same. Keep a copy of the Word. Read it daily. Revere God and follow carefully the words written there. Don’t think of yourself as above what you read.

Remember: If you apply it to others, it applies to you.

**April 9 Evening**

Matthew 28:18-20 *18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

In the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Philippians, chapter 2, Paul explained why Jesus was given all authority. He was obedient to the Father, even to the death of the cross. The authority that Satan took from Adam has been taken back by the second Adam, Christ Jesus. Not only does He have authority here upon earth, but in the heavenlies too. Jesus is Lord! That was the creed of the early church. He is Master over all. God gave Him that position because His humility and obedience showed that He was able to handle that authority. Omnipotence backs that authority. What He has declared will all come to pass in His perfect time.

With that authority, He gave His disciples a command that is referred to as the Great Commission. *Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* A disciple is a learner. He sent them out to teach others what He commanded them. He commanded them to love God with their all and to love their neighbor. He commanded them to believe on the One that God sent, Jesus. He also commanded them to remain in Him and bear much fruit. Those are the basics of the simple things we are to do and teach. As we attempt to do that we find that is easier said than done. What do we need?

We need His presence in and through us! That is why this gospel ends with the promise that He will always be with us. We need His power, wisdom, strength and courage to live and teach what He taught. We need Him to be Lord over us as He lives in us. We have a precious promise in these words. We will be tempted to doubt them, but they are the unfailing words of the One who has been given all authority. Trust those words! Rely on them! He is with you!

Meditation: With God, nothing is impossible.

**April 10 Morning**

Deuteronomy 18:10-11 *10 Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, 11 or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead.*

All these actions are trying to find out the things of the spiritual world without going through God. The demonic realm loves to take the place of God. Demons are real and they are cunning. They will sometimes tell the truth, but for the purpose of deceiving you in the end. The goal is to tell you want you want to hear to lead you down a road of destruction. The ruinous path of evil is well documented.

The people of God were to have nothing to do with these ways. Most religions of that ancient time have died out, but these demonic counterfeits continue just as they did millennium ago. They can still be found in almost every major city of the world. Avoid them like the plague. Pray them out of your city. Warn your friends that dabble in them. The only source of truth about the spiritual realm that is healthy and whole is the Holy Spirit through God’s Word.

It is good to do an inventory and see that none of these things have invaded your home. Warn your children when they are mature enough to understand. As the world comes closer to the end of days, we will see these more blatantly expressed and will be ridiculed for speaking against them. It is not the person we condemn but the power that uses them and the deception that is spoken. Be sure and read tomorrow’s devotion that follows up on this line of thought.

Pray: Lord, keep these influences from finding a foothold in my family and city.

**April 10 Evening**

Mark 1:35, 37-38 *35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. 37 and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" 38 Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else--to the nearby villages--so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."*

Shortly after Jesus moved His ministry from Nazareth to Capernaum, He became swamped with requests for healing. The whole town waited outside the door of the home where He stayed (verse 33). To any rabbi of that day, this would have been the epitome of success. To connect with the masses in such a way as to have them begging for more would have been the pinnacle of achievement. Jesus did not measure His success by man’s standard. You can be sure He was kept up late with the demands the people placed upon Him for ministry, yet, early in the morning, before the dawn, He got up before anyone else to find time alone with His Father, to seek direction for the approaching day.

The disciples went searching for Him because everyone was clamoring for more. “Jesus! It’s revival! Hurry back and capitalize on the situation. What are you doing out here all alone?” Jesus response must have dumbfounded them. “Time to move on boys. We have other cities that need to hear. I didn’t come to be a star; I came to share the good news that kingdom of God is at hand.”

I wonder how much man has interfered with the work of God by staying when it was time to go, by being enamored with success when God desired fruit that remains. If we really want to be a success in the eyes of the One that made us and called us, we need to take the time alone with Him to get our direction. Let us take our eyes off the things that man focuses on and focus on the Father’s direction, His pleasure.

Consider: Fame is fickle. Fortune is fleeting, but pleasing the heart of God is fulfillment and joy that runs deeper than circumstance and time. Are you taking time to hear the Father’s direction?

**April 11 Morning**

Deuteronomy 18:14-15 *14 The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do so. 15 The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.*

The world seeks to know of the spiritual through the evil side. That way they are able to be “spiritual” and yet indulge in their evil nature. It is the same with New Age. There is no demand from a holy God to give up their immorality. There is no standard of a righteous God to which they must conform.

God told the Israelites through Moses that we were not to be like them. Instead we were to watch for the prophet that God was going to raise up. This prophet was going to show us truth of the spiritual realm without compromising with evil. This prophet would be like Moses. Moses was a deliverer. Moses was meek. Moses heard from God and brought God’s Word to the people.

God raised up that prophet, Jesus, from the Jewish nation. We must listen to Him. He has the words of eternal life. But unlike the worldly spiritual ways of self-indulgence, He says we must take up our cross daily and follow Him. He tells us that if we try to save our life we will lose it. No wonder people flock to other ways, ways that lead to death.

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). He is the prophet that Moses said God would bring. We must listen to Him. His way is death to self that leads to life in Him. The way of the sorcerer and diviner promises life, encourages indulgence in what it calls ‘life’, but leads to physical and spiritual death.

Meditation: I must listen to Jesus.

**April 11 Evening**

Mark 2:4-5 *4 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."*

Jesus spent time out in the wilderness areas so that He could minister to those who had desperate needs. They are the ones that would make the journey out to meet with Him. On one return visit to Capernaum, the crowd was so thick that some men broke open the roof to lower their paralyzed friend down to Jesus, who was teaching inside.

Jesus saw the faith of this man’s friends and told him his sins were forgiven.

Immediately Jesus sensed the religious leaders’ unbelief in His ability to forgive sin. Sins are offenses against God. Only the one offended has the right to forgive. To help the crowd understand that He had the power to forgive, He asked them which was easier, to forgive sins, or to say to a paralyzed man, “Stand and walk”? Then He declared that it was so they would know He had power to forgive sins that He told the man to rise and walk.

I can imagine the sense of anticipation in the room. The crowd had probably seen this man for years, lying on his mat. Then the wonder of him getting up must have put them in total awe. The passage says they were amazed and praised God. Now they had to face a religious paradigm shift. They had looked to sacrifices, all their lives, as the means to God’s forgiveness. The man standing before them says it is in His power to forgive, making them right with God. When Jesus shows up in our life, a lot of our theology goes out the window, and we realize it is all about Him. He has the authority to make me right with God. He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. I need only come to Him in faith.

Consider: I hope this encourages you to take others to Him in faith. When He sees your faith in what He can do for your friend, He will forgive them, too.

**April 12 Morning**

Deuteronomy 30:6 *6 The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.*

In the April 3rd devotion we looked at Deut. 10:16. There the Lord commanded us to circumcise our hearts. Here, He says that He will circumcise their hearts and that of their descendants. This expression comes after the Lord promised to return them from the lands to which they were driven. I believe we have yet to see this fulfilled. We have not seen an Israel sensitive to God, but one over whose faces a veil has been placed. But in our day we have seen another return to the Land. Is the time approaching in which the times of the Gentiles will be over and the time for the Jewish people to have their hearts circumcised by God to begin?

As we wait and watch, we should allow God to do that work in our hearts. He will make us ever more sensitive to Him if we allow it. That is His desire. He will not do so against our wishes. He waits for our permission to do a deeper work in each of us. It is a deeply personal relationship that is willing to have a love that feels the joys and pains of another. Are you willing to share God’s burdens? He shares yours. Are you willing to rejoice at the things that rejoice His heart? If you have His Spirit residing in you, then you already do. Still, you can be increasingly sensitive to His heart.

Consider: Invite God to do a deeper work. Take time to share His joys and pains as He does with you. Never be too busy to do so. He is never too busy for you.

**April 12 Evening**

Mark 5:18-20 *18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. 19 Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." 20 So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.*

On this first venture into Gentile territory, Jesus’ boat was met by a storm.

Then, upon arrival, the welcome committee came to meet Him, a demon possessed man who could not even be held by chains. God was bringing the light of the world to the Gentiles, and Satan was doing all he could to keep that from happening. Whenever the Kingdom of God is about to go forward, Satan will be there in opposition. But watch how Jesus turns it around!

The demons did not leave when Jesus commanded them to. They recognized that He has the authority and that they will one day meet their destined fate, but for now they asked to go into a herd of pigs. The Greeks sacrificed pigs to their gods, so this would have been comparable to a flock of sheep to the Jews. Jesus gave them permission, and the pigs jumped off a cliff into the ocean. The people of the region asked Jesus to leave. This Jew, Jesus, had caused them to lose their valuable sacrifices. Satan said, “Check!” It looks like he won that round. Jesus had to leave.

But Jesus had one more surprise move.

The man who had been possessed wanted to follow Jesus, but Jesus sent him back into the town to be a witness of the deliverance that Jesus can bring to men. This infamous man became the first Gentile missionary of the Gospel! When Jesus later returned to the region, He fed the 4000 and many were healed and delivered. Satan may win a round, but Jesus wins in the end! What is incredibly marvelous is that He uses the most unlikely characters to defeat Satan’s schemes. If He can use an infamous demon possessed man who was into self-mutilation, He can use you and me too.

Consider: The Lamb always wins, and in the process shows His amazing attributes of love, mercy and grace.

**April 13 Morning**

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 *19 This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live 20 and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*

Blessings and life or curses and death, those are our choices. There is no middle ground. We must choose one or the other. Heaven and earth will bear witness to the choice we make. Our choice is visible to all created realms.

It is a wonder that Almighty God gives us such a privilege. Considering the horrible consequences to others if we make the wrong choice, it is a wonder that we get to choose at all. But God is not after robots. He wants relational, volitional creatures. He is looking for those who will desire Him and His goodness of their own free will.

In these verses we find that the choice of life that we make affects our children, our love for God, our ability to hear His voice, and our endurance in the faith. It affects the length of our lives. When the choice is laid out so clearly, and the consequences made so plain, who would choose curses and death? Sadly many still do. It is easy to believe the lie that other things can deliver these benefits to our lives, when that choice lines up with our fleshly desires.

The LORD is our life. We may think our life is wrapped up in things and family and friends, but all those are from the LORD. He is life itself. He breathed into us the breath of life.

Meditation: Have I recognized that Jesus is life?

**April 13 Evening**

Mark 5:27-29 *27 When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." 29 Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering*

There is more going on here than meets the Western eye. This woman had a case of perpetual bleeding. Not only was it debilitating, but according to the Jewish law she was considered unclean and supposed to shout out that fact when she was in public. Jesus was in a packed crowd, but this woman was desperate. She had spent her living on doctors that had not helped her. She had gone without human contact for years and was physically and emotionally drained. Jesus was her last hope.

The Jews had the belief that, when the Messiah came, the tassel that hung from the corner of His prayer shawl would heal those who touched it. It is not clear in Mark that this is what she was touching, but the word is clear in Matthew. It is the word that is translated ‘hem’ or ‘tassel’ in NIV. Jesus told the Pharisees that they made this part of their garments long. (Matthew 23:5) It is as if they were saying, “Perhaps I am the Messiah.” When the woman thought, *"If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed”,* she was expressing her conviction that Jesus was the Messiah.

Many people were touching Jesus in that crowd, jostling up against Him. Jesus stopped and said that someone had touched Him. He perceived power flow from Him. What was the difference between this woman’s touch and the crowds’ touch? She had faith. Faith grounded her like a lightning rod. Everyone else was insulated by unbelief. The believing touch drew the power that made her whole.

Remember: When you go to Jesus in prayer, reach out in faith and touch Him. Pound your lightning rod of faith deep into the earth, grab hold and with the other hand touch the Savior. Then, look out! The power will flow.

**April 14 Morning**

Deuteronomy 31:23 *23 The LORD gave this command to Joshua son of Nun: "Be strong and courageous, for you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them on oath, and I myself will be with you."*

God commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous. It is repeated so many times in Scripture that I wonder if he was a fearful person. Often God chooses those who must act against their natural inclinations to show that the anointing and power is from God. Certainly he was confident in God, for he and Caleb were the only ones from the previous generation who had the faith to take on the giants.

We can take this commandment as if it were spoken to us. We, too, lead others into the Promised Land. Anyone that is on the pilgrimage and looking for their heavenly home is in some way leading others into that land. That is God’s desire for us so that we can know He will be with us also.

The promise of God to be with Joshua must have given Joshua great confidence. He had seen how God had helped Moses and worked through Moses to lead the people. If God could do that through Moses, who was afraid he couldn’t speak well, certainly he could do it through Joshua as well.

And what about you? If you know God is with you as He has been with others you know, those who have gone before you, doesn’t it inspire your confidence that He will see you through also? *“I myself will be with you."* Could we hear a more comforting expression? It should inspire us to heed the command to be strong and courageous.

Consider: The call to strength and courage was not a request. It was a command.

**April 14 Evening**

Mark 5:35-36, 42 *35 While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher any more?" 36 Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe."*

*42 Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.*

Jesus used Capernaum as a base of operations. The synagogue foundation can still be seen today. Archeologists uncovered first century coins there. That confirms it to be the one referred to in the Gospels. The ruler or leader, Jairus, had no doubt heard Jesus speak and seen the miracles that were performed, even in his synagogue. The leaders had decided together to kill Jesus because of their envy of His large following and His exposure of the error of their traditions (Matthew 12:14). But when death comes knocking at the door of someone you love, tradition isn’t valuable enough to fight over.

In desperation, Jairus went to the man he had probably shunned. Sometimes it takes near tragedy to get us to stop and reevaluate our stand. Jesus never held a grudge. He immediately agreed to go see his daughter. On the way there, men from Jairus house came to tell him the bad news. “Your daughter is dead.” Jesus ignored them and told Jairus not to be afraid, but believe. When we consider what was most likely Jairus’ attitude toward Jesus before this event, we can marvel at the graciousness of Christ. Most men would probably have stopped right there and said, “Ha! God dealt with your envy toward me. Repent or more tragedy will strike.” But Jesus isn’t like most men. He has a heart for the hurting and knows the goodness of God leads man to repentance.

He put out of the room everyone but his closest three disciples and the parents.

Then He commanded her to get up. The word of Jesus is more powerful than any affliction. Many Christians today would tell a person in need the same thing, but please note, this encouragement was the word of the Lord and not man. If Jesus says it, you can say it, and you will see it happen. Be cautious not to build hope in something that is not from Jesus’ lips to that specific situation.

Remember: This is not a formula to deal with death or no one would stay dead. It is a revelation of the heart of our Savior and His power over death itself.

**April 15 Morning**

Deuteronomy 32:3-4 ***3*** *I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God !****4*** *He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.*

The name of the LORD is the sum of His attributes. Notice that when Moses says He will proclaim the name of the LORD, he proclaims the character of God.

Whenever we read of “the name of the LORD’” we should see this implied. He is great! His greatness should be praised. Because He is all-powerful, He never lacks the ability to carry out His decrees. The goodness He has planned will be brought to pass, for He has the power to make it happen.

He is a rock. Theologians call this immutability. The world is ever changing. Our great hope is that we do change, but with God there has never been and never will be a change. He is always the same perfect God He has been and will be. Because He is outside of time and the Creator of time, time never affects Him, the Ancient of Days. You can count on Him to always be the same loving God that keeps His promises.

His works are perfect. A perfect God acts perfectly. He makes no mistakes. In spite of our limited perception of things, one day you will see all His actions are perfect.

All His ways are just. He is a holy God. It is impossible for Him to be unjust.

His justice is beyond question for He is the very standard for justice.

He is faithful. He will keep His promises. He promised to complete the work He started in you. Because He has always been faithful and can never change, you will see He’ll be faithful to transform you into His likeness.

Meditate on these attributes of God.

**April 15 Evening**

Mark 7:32-33, 37 *32 There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. 33 After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears.*

*Then he spit and touched the man's tongue.*

*37 People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."*

Jesus returned to the Decapolis region some time after being asked to leave. You may recall the story of the demons going into the pigs. The man who was delivered had witnessed to the area what Jesus had done for him. This time crowds met Him. They brought a man who could not hear nor speak well.

Jesus never seems to follow a pattern. I hope that is a lesson for us today. His only pattern is to hear the Father’s direction and obey. The passage doesn’t say clearly, but it sounds like He spit on His fingers and touched the man’s tongue. If the problem is the man’s hearing, there is not a natural chance that his speech will clear up. That would require years of listening and mimicking just like a child learns. But Jesus is not a natural chance. He can instantly teach what is not known. He can enable where there has been no learning experience, and He does it through the most unpredictable means.

When the man was healed and his speech miraculously made clear, the crowd was overwhelmed with amazement. When was the last time you were overwhelmed with amazement? If we watch the Lord at work in the world around us, it will happen quite often. We may need our eyes touched so that we are enabled to see. Jesus does everything well, even today in your life.

Prayer: “Lord, touch my eyes to see Your work in the world around me, that my heart might overflow with amazement, that today, You do all things well!

**April 16 Morning**

Joshua 1:7-8 *7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*

The Law was to guide the new nation in the ways of God. Joshua, as their commander, was told to be careful to obey it all. If leaders do not follow after God, they lead the people astray. But if they follow hard after God through obedience to His Word, many will be challenged to do the same. Joshua was encouraged to meditate on the words of the Law. He was supposed to talk about it all the time. Most of all, he was told to be careful to live it. We can talk about it and study it, but if that does not translate into living it then our words are misunderstood by the message our actions preach.

If Joshua would do these things, he was twice promised that he would be successful, and even prosperous. I don’t think the principle has changed. If we will do the same thing, we will have the same results.

Meditation upon the Word is a holy habit that is not much employed today. Most mature Christians will spend time reading the Word, speaking of the Word, and applying it to their lives, but few meditate upon the passages they read. This often involves memorization. Take time to let the word you read speak to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to make it come alive and apply it to your daily situations. The quantity of Scripture read is not as important as seeing the application to your life. Look for God’s eternal truth in each passage you read.

Meditate on the Scripture for today. What is God saying to you?

**April 16 Evening**

Mark 9:22-24 *2 "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." 23 "'If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." 24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

Jesus came upon His disciples and found them arguing. The issue at hand was a young boy who was possessed by a spirit. The father explained that he had brought the boy to Jesus’ disciples but they could not cast it out. As soon as the spirit saw Jesus it threw the boy onto the ground causing him to roll around and foam at the mouth. We would diagnose this as an epileptic seizure. There is one clue that something more is taking place. The father told Jesus that the spirit often cast the boy into fire or water to kill him. Who does that kind of work? The Destroyer! The thief has come to kill, steal, and destroy. People often blame tragedy upon God when it is the work of the evil one. Those signs of destruction, theft, and death, are his calling cards.

The man asked Jesus to heal the boy if He could. Jesus picked up on his wording, “If you can”. Jesus believes completely in the Father. The man realized what Jesus was saying but acknowledged his human weakness. *"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"* We can surely relate to that expression. We believe by the grace of God, but there remains in our flesh some unbelief. We desire the help of God to overcome that unbelief. We acknowledge that without the Spirit’s help we will never overcome it. This honest assessment brought the miracle the man desired. The son was delivered from the evil spirit.

When you are faced with the need for a miracle, when the enemy comes in like a flood, be honest with your Savior. Tell Him about your struggle with unbelief, and ask for His help to overcome it. Do you think the miracle helped the man overcome his unbelief? It most assuredly did! When God meets your honesty with a miraculous resolution, allow that to help you overcome unbelief.

Remember: With God, all things are possible!

**April 17 Morning**

Joshua 1:9 *9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."*

Two times in this chapter and once from the mouth of Moses, Joshua has heard, “Be strong and courageous”. See yesterday’s morning devotional and Deuteronomy 31:23. Sometimes we need to hear it from God personally to really have faith. What a word this is for us when there is a change in leadership or we begin to be called to lead. Why should we never be terrified or discouraged? The LORD our God is with us wherever we are.

Here we see two tools of the enemy, fear or terror, and discouragement. Today we often label discouragement as depression. If Satan can get you to forget about God's omnipotence and omnipresence, then he has a position from which he can resist God in you. When we realize that is a lie, our faith in who God has been, and is today, enables God in us to be an unbeatable foe, which is Satan's worse nightmare. It takes faith in God to receive the enabling.

Discouragement is a tough battle to fight. Moses succumbed to it at times.

Joshua would surely face situations that on the surface would look discouraging. Certainly every one of us does. We need to respond with eyes that see the spiritual realm. There, all things work together for good, and even the defeats are steps forward. Only eyes of faith that see God with us, working through the difficulty, can claim this positive attitude that keeps us strong and courageous. Are you faced with discouragement? Open your spiritual eyes and see past the difficulty to God in you working good things into your life.

Consider: Am I seeing with eyes of faith?

**April 17 Evening**

Mark 12:35-37 *35 While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, "How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? 36 David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet."' 37 David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" The large crowd listened to him with delight.*

After answering all the trick questions presented to Him in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, Jesus had a question for those who inquired of Him. Jesus referred to one of His most quoted passages, Psalms 110:1. They all knew that the Scripture plainly taught that the Messiah would descend from David. The prophecies declared this One would reign forever. Then He reminded them that the Scriptures are written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. To these points they could all agree. Now He springs the trap on them. Unlike the traps they were setting for Him, His trap is intended to bring them life. Their questions were designed to bring accusation. His questions were designed to bring revelation. This is a good tool of discerning our own heart and the intent of others. Ask yourself if your desire in asking a question is to bring life or to find fault.

The word translated ‘Lord’ is from two different words. An expanded translation in contemporary language would be, The Eternal One said to my Master… If David called Him Master, how can He be his son? The Jews saw a father as superior to his son. The question is then, how can a son of a man be the man’s master? Now it is the Pharisees that are on the spot. They cannot answer. They have no idea how that could be. There is only one way it could be, incarnation. The Word became flesh through the womb of a woman descended from David. Jesus was all God and all man, but without sin. Jesus is David’s Master and his descendant. Through the revelation of the Holy Spirit, David heard the Father ask His only begotten Son, Jesus, to sit at His right hand until all His enemies were put under His feet.

The people listened with delight. The religious leaders had pushed them around with their interpretations of God’s Word. Now they are silent, unable to answer questions about the Word. They did not respond with a desire to understand but with a plot to murder the One that understood the Word better than they.

Consider the divine wisdom with which Jesus answered His critics.

**April 18 Morning**

Joshua 2:10-11 *10 We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed.11 When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.*

Of all the people in this city, this harlot named Rahab was the one who wanted the true God. They all heard the stories of how God had been with Israel, and they were all fearful, but only Rahab had the sense to align herself with that God.

Your testimony is one of your most powerful witnesses that your God is God in heaven above and earth below. Perhaps you do not have amazing stories like the Israelites did, but a godly life is an amazing story in itself. The fruits of the Spirit have their own attractive testimony. Honest people know they are evidence of God at work in the world! If you have an impressive story of deliverance tell it. Don’t underestimate the testimony of a godly life.

There are Rahabs out there in the world watching and discerning. We should watch for them also so that we can tell them the wonder of the God who delivered us and goes before us through life. The Spirit of God goes before us, preparing hearts to be receptive. Rahab became a part of the lineage of Jesus. You never know how your testimony will affect lives. The ramifications are usually much wider than we can imagine.

Prayer: Lord, help the testimony of my life lead people to You.

**April 18 Evening**

Mark 12:42-44 *42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. 43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything--all she had to live on."*

Jesus was watching the offerings. That is an interesting thought. You do realize that He watches them today, don’t you? He was not looking at percentages, but at the willingness of the giver and the sacrifice that was made. Our world tends to make a big fuss over large donations. We make oversize checks and display them while giving a great banquet to celebrate the occasion. We think of all that can be accomplished through that large gift.

Jesus has another perspective, as usual. It is His Father’s eternal perspective. That huge donation that would buy a new building wing is a very temporal thing in light of eternity. The widow’s heart, however, showed a love for God, a faith in His provision, which pleased the heart of the Father. It gains heaven’s interest rate! Which gift means more? Jesus said that her gift was more than ALL the others!

You may only have a little to give. That might embarrass you, but remember that it is not the size of the gift. It is about the size of the heart of the giver. No matter how poor you are, you can give more than the entire congregation! Is God pleased with the size of your heart? It is reflected in the proportion of your giving. This is not written to increase the size of church coffers, but encourage you to allow the Spirit to increase the size of your heart.

Consider: The need that presents itself to you today may be the providence of God to allow you to invest in eternity and earn heaven’s interest rate.

**April 19 Morning**

Joshua 3:5 *5 Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."*

Moses died. Now the Children of Israel stood where they stood 38 years earlier. The generation that refused to go in is now dead, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb. Joshua tells them to get ready to see God at work.

Sanctify, dedicate yourselves wholly. If we are about to see God at work we had better be right with Him. The people had heard of how God had met with them in power and might on the mountain. They could not stand to hear the voice of God and asked Moses to talk with God for them. They had a healthy fear of God. If God is going to work among us, all compromise must end. We need to make sure there is no thing that will cause us to be judged as unfit. Then God is free to do what He desires. We can only see the hand of God work in all its glory when we consecrate ourselves without reservation to Him. Then you will see amazing things.

Do you expect God to work in the place where you fellowship? Do you expect this Sunday to see God do amazing things among you? Then get prepared by consecrating your life, by seeing that there is nothing between you and God. When a congregation does this in unity, prepare to see God move. He comes when He is invited by sincere consecrated hearts. Yes, He is always here, but if you want to see amazing things, like changed lives, consecrate yourselves.

Prayer: Lord, I give my body, soul, and spirit to You. Use me as You will.

**April 19 Evening**

Mark 13:35-37 *35 "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back--whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"*

Jesus likened His return to a master who went on a journey. He asked the keeper of the door to stand watch. To watch meant to be vigilant. It meant to actively be attentive. Though the master of the household is away, the servants are supposed to go about their business and not take advantage of His absence. We do not have the manifest presence of Christ here before us reminding us that He is Lord. The gentle Holy Spirit within our hearts is easily quieted by our stubborn willfulness. These words of Christ came at the end of His discourse on the destruction of the Temple and His Second Coming. In the millenniums in between, many Christians have heard this warning to remain at their post.

The world would lull us to sleep with ease and comfort, but we must remember we don’t know the number of our days. No one is guaranteed 80 years. Accidents and disease strike without warning. You could enter into His presence today. Will He find you were vigilant to the end? Will He find your first love was still burning strong? Death may find you in your youth, in middle age, or in your twilight years. Remain vigilant to the end. Jesus may return when you are not expecting. What will He find you doing? At 12 years of age He said He had to be about His Father’s business. At 30 years of age He said He had done the work the Father had given Him to do. Jesus is our ultimate example of remaining actively attentive to the will of the Father throughout His life.

Those servants who are found to be faithful at His return will be rewarded. Those who are asleep, lulled by the world into inactivity, will be dealt with. Are you watching?

Consider: Will this day find you actively attentive to the work the Master has given you to do? Endure! Watch! We must be about our Father’s business.

**April 20 Morning**

Joshua 4:23-24 *23 For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over.24 He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God."*

When Israel was prepared to cross, the Levites carried the ark into the Jordan River at flood stage. As soon as their feet touched the water it rolled back like the time they crossed the Red Sea. The Levites stood there with the ark while the whole nation crossed. Then a man from each tribe picked a stone out of the riverbed to make a memorial. When the ark was carried to the other side the water returned to flood stage.

It’s humorous to hear people try to give physical reasons as to why that happened. I think they are desperate to say it wasn’t an unexplainable miracle. Does it really matter? It would be just as great a miracle if some physical event caused it at the very moment the feet of those carrying the ark touched the water. It is as if we do not want to acknowledge that God can do anything He wants any time He wants. That thought makes God so much greater than we usually think of Him. It humbles us. Flesh doesn’t like to be humbled.

God did it like He did to show He is powerful and that you might always fear the Lord your God. God is on the throne of heaven and can do whatever He wills. Get use to it now, because it will be that way forever.

Meditation: Our God is an awesome God!

**April 20 Evening**

Mark 14:70-72 *70 Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." 71 He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about." 72 Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.*

Peter, bold, blustery, confident Peter, didn’t run like most of the disciples. He followed Jesus to the home of Caiaphas. John was there too. John was known by the priestly family and not under the threat that the other disciples would have been. As Peter warmed himself by the fire, he could probably hear talk of taking this prisoner to Pilate for permission for execution. That was a dangerous place to be. Execution Roman style meant unspeakable pain, the most excruciating death imaginable. To sit there by that fire in the enemy’s courtyard was really taking a chance. Peter had promised he would not leave Jesus alone, but then he was spotted. “Aren’t you one of them? You have a Galilean accent.”

The third denial came with curses, anything to get out of being caught right there and then. He denied any knowledge of Jesus. Then the rooster crowed just as Jesus had predicted. Luke wrote that at that moment Jesus turned and looked straight at Peter (Luke 22:61). Peter broke down. He was not as strong as he believed himself to be. Neither am I. Neither are you. Without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). We can make all the oaths we want, but without His power we will never keep one of them.

Have you sat in that courtyard? I have. As I waited on a customer, they began to speak about the “born-againers.” Would I remain silent and deny that I knew Him to remain in this person’s favor? Silence is denial. When I stand to pray at the graduation will I say the name of my Savior, or give in to the demands that I use the generic “god.” JESUS! What a name! It brings division. It stirs up emotions. If I remain silent, I should weep with Peter. The Lord turns to look at you and me also. Don’t deny that you know Him. I hope our lives are a dead giveaway that we are one of His disciples. I hope there is enough evidence to convict us of being His.

Prayer: Lord, help us not to deny You!

**April 21 Morning**

Joshua 5:8-9 *8 And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed.9 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So the place has been called Gilgal to this day.*

Upon crossing the Jordan, Joshua was commanded to circumcise all the males. All those who crossed the Jordan had been born on the way, during the wanderings in the wilderness. For some reason, they waited until they arrived in the Promised Land to be circumcised.

This was a great act of faith. They are in the enemies’ territory, and the pain makes them unable to fight. There are 40,000 armed men laying helpless until they heal. Their history included the account of when they had slaughtered a village that was unable to fight because of circumcision. But this was God’s order, and by faith, they obeyed and trusted God to protect them. I think the Lord does the same with us, asking us to make ourselves vulnerable to our enemies, and yet trust Him to keep us safe.

All through this wilderness wandering we had heard the whine about how good they had it in Egypt. There were numerous plans to return. Once they even had a vote to elect someone to guide them back. God had taken them from Egypt but could not get Egypt out of them. They needed to cooperate but refused. Now that that generation had died and the new generation was circumcised to God, the reproach of Egypt is finally gone. Egypt is out of them. Is the world out of you? Gilgal sounds like the Hebrew word for ‘roll’. Let God roll Egypt (worldliness) out of your life so that all your desire is toward Him.

Consider: God may take you into precarious situations to teach you to trust Him.

**April 21 Evening**

Mark 14:65 *65 Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophesy!" And the guards took him and beat him.*

Though most historians believe these to be Roman guards assigned to a temporary service of the High Priest, I do not think the text implies this. Instead, I think they were a group of Jewish thugs that were in service to the High Priest. This abuse took place after the mock trial before the Sanhedrin.

The spitting in the face is an act of declaring the shame upon the one spit upon (Numbers 12:14). It is interesting to note that the Lord used spit to heal, but man uses it to insult. The blindfolding of Jesus seems to be directly related to His claim of being the Messiah. Roman soldiers would not have come up with this thought; it is purely Jewish. The Messiah was prophesied to judge correctly without hearing or seeing (Isaiah 11:3). When they struck Him, they asked Him to judge who it was that had committed the crime. If He was the Messiah He should know their name.

He could have told them their name and that of their entire lineage back to Adam, but He remained silent. He was determined to endure this to the end for you and me.

Then the guards took Him and beat Him. These men were trained fighters. They knew how to inflict pain. The rabbinical laws forbid the abuse of a condemned man, but this was no ordinary prisoner. It was envy that caused the religious leaders to murder Him. They were convicted by His words, and shamed by His increasing number of followers. They were being exposed for what they really were. No abuse would have been too much. Jesus endured for the joy that was set before Him. He endured because He knew you would one day come and find the cleansing that He would provide through the cross.

Meditation: Treasure your salvation. Never forget the high price paid for it.

**April 22 Morning**

Joshua 5:11-12 ***11*** *The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain.****12*** *The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan.*

Israel celebrated their first Passover in the Promised Land. As soon as they ate the food of that land, the manna stopped. I wonder if the next morning they got up by habit to go out and collect it. For forty years God had provided angels’ food for them on a daily basis. Now that they are home, they can eat of the good of the land that God has given them.

God provides for us. He is Jehovah Jireh, the LORD provides. He won’t give us too much, but He will give us enough to sustain us. As we travel through this life, as long as we have a need, the LORD will provide. We can count on our daily manna. As long as we go out to gather it and don’t try to keep it overnight, we will always be able to fill our jars. We will have just enough.

But that land to which we are going will have an abundance and variety. The Lord is still our portion and our cup, but instead of coming from above, He will be all around us. One day, the angel of the second death will pass over us because of what Jesus did in our place. Then we will be home and eating freely of the abundance of the land.

Meditation: I’m on my way to something better. This world is not my home.

**April 22 Evening**

Mark 15:21-23 *21 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. 22 They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). 23 Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.*

The beatings and Roman scourging had so weakened Jesus that He could not carry the crossbeam to the site of the crucifixion. Jesus was at the end of physical ability. A man who had journeyed from North Africa to celebrate the Feast of Passover, Simon, was forced to carry the beam. His children later became well known in the early church. This encounter with Jesus would change his life.

There is some debate about where the crucifixion site is. Two popular ones exist in Jerusalem, but no one can say for sure which, if either, is authentic. It would have been near a gate and beside a road. The Scriptures tell us He was brought to a hill, not on a hill. It was probably a place used regularly for executions.

A group of Jewish women regularly met those who were to be crucified to offer a pain deadening mixture of strong wine and myrrh. When Jesus tasted it, He refused it. He had promised not to drink the fruit of the vine until He drank it new with the disciples in the Kingdom (Mark 14:25). The women pitied Him, but He grieved for them, for He knew they were rejecting their only hope. Their pity was a mere human sentimentality. His was that of both the suffering Jerusalem was about to endure and an eternal perspective. We would have welcomed anything to deaden the pain. Jesus met death head on, determined not to flinch but to conquer it for us.

There is a lesson in His determination. We often skirt our trials, looking for the easy way out. Jesus faced them with faith in His Father. He knew that total reliance on the Father would see Him through anything even if it meant obedience unto death. That is faith!

Prayer: Lord, when we are faced with the trials that inevitably come from obedience to You, help us to face them with Your resolute determination.

**April 23 Morning**

Joshua 5:13-14 ***13*** *Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"****14*** *"Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"*

Joshua was ready to go to war, but He needed direction from His commander in chief. As he approached Jericho, he saw this great warrior with sword drawn. “Whose side are you on?” he asked. “Neither!” came the reply. This is none other than Jesus. He appears a number of times in the Old Testament. These appearances are referred to as “Christophanies.” Notice that in the following verses He told Joshua that he was on holy ground, just as the God told Moses at the burning bush.

Whose side is Jesus on? Jew or Gentile? Neither! He is not willing that any should perish. The Canaanites would die because of their iniquity and the devastating pain they were inflicting on one another and their own souls. Their cup of iniquity was full. That does not mean that God did not desire for them to repent, or that He is just for Israel. Rahab and her family were about to be spared. They were the only ones that were receptive to the God of Israel. This Warrior is on her side. He is on the side of anyone of any nationality, in any place and any time, who is willing to receive the truth.

Consider: When we are confronted with the Commander, just do as Joshua did. Ask with great reverence what message our Lord has for His servant.

**April 23 Evening**

Luke 1:13-15 *13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth*

Luke was the only Gospel writer who was not an eyewitness to the events. It seems that many of his accounts came from Mary and the other disciples. His Gospel is one of the three synoptics, Matthew and Mark being the other two. They cover many of the same stories. He tells in much greater detail the events that surround the birth of Jesus, including this story of John the Baptist’s birth.

In that age and culture, it was a great shame for a woman to be childless. It was as if their purpose in life had not been accomplished. Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were getting up in years. Zechariah was a priest that served in the

Temple. His name had been drawn for this special service of burning the incense. The other priests would have moved to the outer court to wait for the smoke to ascend. It represented the prayers of the people. There, in the Holy Place, the angel Gabriel appeared. The familiar greeting is given, “Do not be afraid.” The angel announced that his prayer has been heard, and that they would have a very special child. This child would be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth. He has the specific task of preparing the Jewish people for the coming of the Messiah. He would be instrumental in turning the hearts of many back to the Lord. Zechariah had trouble believing it was even possible at their age. The angel gave him the sign to verify it. Zechariah became unable to speak because of his refusal to believe the messenger.

We come with our petitions to the Lord, but when some answers are delayed in coming, we lose faith. We are still praying, but we don’t expect it is even possible. With God, all things are possible. Don’t give up hope, but pray with expectation. John’s birth was all the more joyous because it came when they thought it was impossible.

Remember: Believe the word God sends to you.

**April 24 Morning**

Joshua 6:16-17 *16 The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city! 17 The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent.*

What an unconventional battle plan the Commander gave to Joshua! We need to get our battle plans from the Lord. He knows how to go about it in a way that will bring Him all the glory. You know that when other people heard of how God brought victory over Jericho, in future wars, Israel had the psychological advantage.

In Israel’s case, it was an expression of praise to God. In the battle Gideon led, they shouted, “The sword of the LORD and of Gideon.” They probably shouted something similar here. When they did the walls fell inward and the army marched straight in.

Since this was the first city (firstfruits), and God was giving the victory, everything in it was to be dedicated to God. The gold and silver were to go into the treasury and everything else was to be burned. The promise of the spies to Rahab was carefully kept.

When you go into battle be sure and get your battle plans from the Commander. Give Him the praise and the glory for the victory. The honor is due Him. His way is the best way. Keep those promises you made along the way to the battle. Give to God what is God’s.

Consider: Are you getting your battle plans from man or from the Commander in Chief? We need to hear from Him for each battle we face.

**April 24 Evening**

Luke 1:34-35, 38 *34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*

*38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.*

Gabriel’s next visit was to Mary. This must have been the most exciting mission he’d been sent on up to that time. He tells this young woman that God has highly favored her. Then he gives her the familiar angelic greeting, “Fear not.” It seems these magnificent creatures must speak that to every human they encounter. She is told that she had found favor with God and that she would have a son that was to be named Jesus (the salvation of Jehovah). That child would inherit David’s throne and reign forever.

Women of that day prayed to be the mother of the Messiah. They did not understand that the Messiah would suffer and die before the throne of David was reestablished, or they might not have been so desirous of that honor.

Mary asks how it is even possible. Though she is engaged to Joseph, she has not been with a man. Gabriel tells her the child will be conceived of the Holy Spirit, and thus He will be called the Son of God. He was to be born of a woman, and yet that conception was through the working of the Holy Spirit.

Then we see why God chose this young woman. To that incredible proposal she responded, *“I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."* She would face ridicule and potentially be stoned because people would think that she had been unfaithful to her fiancée. What would he think? Yet, at the root of her answer is the reason she accepted the task. “*I am the Lord's servant.”* The issue is not what people think or how I will come through, the issue is my relationship with God. I am His servant. It is His to decide what role I am to play in His story. I yield my life to His plan.

Consider: Do I have Mary’s attitude?

**April 25 Morning**

Joshua 7:1a, 4-5a ***1****But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things…* *4 So about three thousand men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai,5a who killed about thirty-six of them.*

Everything in Jericho belonged to the LORD. He gave the victory, and as a sign of faith that the LORD would deliver the rest of their enemies into their hands, they were to give everything to God. One man, Achan, kept some of the spoils of war. He buried it under his tent. He must have thought that no one would ever know the difference.

When Israel went to the next battle, they chose a small city named Ai. They sent just 3,000 soldiers, for they thought the size of the city would warrant no more than that. To their surprise they were defeated and lost 36 men. Why? After such a miraculous victory over a much larger city, what went wrong?

Joshua fell on his face and cried out to God. God told him to get up and deal with the sin of Israel. There is a principle here that relates to us today. Because God is holy, He does not bless hidden sin. He cannot overlook rebellion. Achan was just one man, but he held up the whole nation. His actions indirectly caused the death of those 36 men. God said Israel had sinned, when in fact it was one man. Until that sin was dealt with God would not bless their actions.

The same can be true in our life. One area cannot slide by in rebellion and we still have the blessing of God. It is true for our families, for our churches, our cities, and our nation. We need to allow God to expose the sin, so that we can forsake it, find forgiveness, and be blessed. ***13*** *He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy*. Proverbs 28:13

Consider: Have I done something that would stop the blessing of God?

**April 25 Evening**

Luke 1:46-49 *46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name.*

The angel Gabriel shared a secret with Mary. He told her that her cousin

Elizabeth was six months pregnant. Mary, now pregnant herself, went to see her. As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary’s voice, the baby in her womb jumped. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke a word of revelation. She knew that Mary was the mother of her Lord! She told Mary she was blessed among women.

Then Mary uttered her song of praise. She acknowledged the blessing God had given her, the greatness of the miraculous conception. Then she added that God’s name is holy. Yes! He is utterly apart from creation and yet He is imminently present. He is completely pure, and yet He even became physically present to redeem fallen man.

In the womb of Mary, tiny hands were forming. Those hands had designed Mary. They had set the earth in motion. They had thrown the stars in space. This was the miracle of all miracles, that God could become physically manifest. It was the greatest expression of love ever seen. It would culminate in the cross and ultimately resurrection. If you can accept this miracle, all the other miracles are only natural results of this one. Either this story is the greatest lie the world has ever known and Christmas is a total distortion of history, or God became a man to redeem you and me. If it is true, and the life of Jesus verified it, then we had better heed the words of the God who physically manifested Himself for our sake.

In a metaphoric way, the baby growing in Mary’s womb is like Christ being formed in us. As time marches on, more and more of the life of Christ should be formed within us, until He is manifested in our lives.

Consider: Let that life in you be expressed in all His fullness.

**April 26 Morning**

Joshua 9:14-15 ***14*** *The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the LORD.****15****Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath.*

After Israel conquered Ai, the Hivites that occupied nearby towns concocted a deception to save their lives. They sent a group of men that pretended they had come on a long journey. They had bags of moldy bread and looked travel weary.

Actually they were the next towns that Israel would battle.

The leaders of Israel saw the dry wineskins, the patched sandals, and the worn bags with moldy bread and believed their story. Besides, it was kind of uplifting to hear how people in far off lands had heard the testimony of what God was doing for them. Great testimony wasn’t it?

They ate together and made a treaty with these deceivers. They had believed what their eyes had seen instead of consulting with the LORD. Now there was nothing they could do but put those people to work serving Israel. They could not take their lands as God had purposed for them.

Satan is the Great Deceiver. He often brings in subtle lies that make you feel good about yourself. It may even look like it is giving glory to God. We must consult the LORD. We must ask God to lead and not be led by our natural senses.

We are easily tricked, but God is never deceived. He will always give us the best advice. Our failure to do so may not be a total loss, but it is not the highest and best that God had planned for us. Consult God in His Word, in prayer, with godly counsel, and walk by faith not by sight.

Consider: Am I trusting God, or my senses?

**April 26 Evening**

Luke 1:51-53 *51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.*

Today’s passage is the rest of Mary’s Holy Spirit inspired song upon meeting her cousin Elizabeth. (see April 25 evening) This was an amazing event in history. The woman whose womb holds the forerunner of the Messiah and the last Old Testament prophet had just met her cousin whose womb held the Messiah. They were both filled with the Spirit and uttered prophetic words. Mary’s words are believed to have originally come forth as a song.

In the latter half of the song, we have the passage for today. It is a sweeping view of the work of God. It gives us a principle of the way God works. God is writing history by His mighty acts. Those who are proud, even secretly within their hearts, are scattered. Pride is such an offense to God because He knows how utterly needy and poor man is. Pride denies the true condition of man and the wonder of God. God takes the rulers off their thrones and lifts up the humble. The people who think they have power find that God can take that power from them in a moment. It is the humble that find themselves exalted.

Near Bethlehem is Herod’s incredible structure, the Herodium. Like a giant hill on the landscape, this towering circular structure is an architectural wonder. Underneath it are vast cisterns for water storage. Before it was a giant water arena in which mock sea battles that included hippos were performed. Surely the King of the Jews would be born in such a magnificent place. No, the incarnate God was born in the shadow of this structure in a little rock grotto. The humble unknown woman from Nazareth, a tiny, despised town in the far north, gave birth to the God-man, Jesus. God lifted up the humble.

Those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness will be filled. They know they are needy. They know God is great. They know He is their only hope. They touch reality. May we all lose our pride in recognition of the reality of our sinful condition and the awesome sufficiency of God.

Consider: Your view of this reality will determine whether you go away hungry or filled.

**April 27 Morning**

Joshua 10:12-13 ***12*** *On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon."****13*** *So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day.*

Kings of the land gathered to attack the Hivites who had made peace with Israel. Joshua was a man of integrity. He honored the treaty with the Hivites even though it had been made through deceit. The LORD encouraged Joshua to attack the kings and not be afraid. God even caused hailstones to take out the fleeing armies of the kings.

There were so many soldiers in confusion that Joshua asked God to give him more time. God answered that prayer by almost doubling the hours in that day. This was not a natural phenomenon, and it just cannot be explained. It was miraculous. It was God doing what He had promised to do.

It was not as though the Israelites had been perfect. This whole battle was due to not consulting the LORD. But their heart was right with God. They recognized their mistake and were obedient. This time God’s instruction was to go and defeat the enemy. God took a bad situation and used it to give them a one-day victory over five kings, expediting their victory over the land.

Because you made a mistake in the past that has consequences today does not mean the LORD can’t use it for your good. Listen to Him today. Obey Him today and watch what looks like a problem turn to a blessing when God fights for you.

Consider: If your heart is right with God, He can even turn mistakes into victories.

**April 27 Evening**

Luke 2:8-10 *8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*

The shepherds must have relayed this amazing story to Mary, who in turn relayed it to Luke. This is one of the many authentications of the truth of the Gospel events. If the Gospel writers were making this up, they would never have had the initial announcement go to shepherds and magi.

Shepherds were considered second-class citizens of the day. Their testimony was considered unreliable. They were often the first to be held in suspicion when thefts occurred. Shepherding had fallen as far as it could fall in the thousand years between King David and Jesus. No, if Luke were making up this story, he never would have chosen the shepherds to be the recipients of angelic announcement, yet this fits perfectly with God’s style.

Remember in yesterday evening’s devotion that Mary’s prophetic words declared that God lifts up the humble? He fills the hungry with good things, but He sends the rich away empty. The first to visit the humble manger were humble shepherds. The Gospel is not for those who are full. It is for those who are empty.

The despised and lowly find angels revealing good news.

The angels’ announcement said this is good news for all people. It is not just for the Jew or just for the poor. It is for all those that are hungry, for all those who are seeking, and for all who are willing to receive it. Could there be any greater joy than knowing that God loved us so much that He sent His Son to make a way for us to come to God? It is still good news of great joy for all the people. Have you found it to be the great joy of your life? If not, it may be that you have not realized all that this birth means to you.

Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you why this should be your great joy.

**April 28 Morning**

Joshua 14:13-14 *13 Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance.14 So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.*

Caleb reminisced with Joshua about spying out the Promised Land some forty-five years earlier. He reminded Joshua about how faithful he was to report that they could take the land because of his godly convictions. Then he reminded Joshua about the promise Moses had made to him. He could have whatever land he walked on. Caleb picked the Hebron area. There were still fortified cities with giants in them, but Caleb knew the LORD was with him. He felt as strong at eighty-five as he did at forty.

Joshua blessed Caleb and honored Moses’ promise, because Caleb wholeheartedly followed the God of Israel. It sounds like Caleb was going to take the area with his own clan, without the assistance of the other tribes. What a guy!

Eighty-five-years-old and he’s ready to take on giants and start a new homestead.

What was Caleb’s secret? He wholeheartedly followed the God of Israel. He stuck with his convictions in spite of what the majority said. He did not fear but recognized the hand of God was with him, no rationalization, no justification, just convictions backed up by action.

Do you have a spirit like Caleb’s? Why or why not? He wasn’t born with it. It was instilled in him, because he was willing.

Meditation: The LORD rewards those who follow Him with their whole heart.

**April 28 Evening**

Luke 2:29-32 *29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."*

When God delivered Israel from the last plague on Egypt, He spared the firstborn through the blood of the lambs on the doorposts. From that time forward, God claimed the rights to every firstborn male. The parents had to buy back the child with an offering. Mary and Joseph had gone to the Temple to give this offering. When they arrived, a man named Simeon greeted them. He was not like the ritualistic religious leaders of his day. He communed with the Holy Spirit. It was revealed to him that he would not die until he saw the Anointed One that would save his people.

When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus into the Temple, Simeon knew in his spirit that this baby was the One. He uttered the prophecy in our passage for today. He had seen the One, and now he was ready to die. He saw the salvation that God prepared right before everyone’s eyes. This is the One who would fulfill the prophecies of being a light to the nations of the world and the glory of God’s people, Israel.

What a special person this man was. Only one other person had this insight in the Temple that day. Simeon’s whole life was waiting for the arrival of God’s salvation, Jesus. Just to see that child had come was enough for him. It should be enough for us too. Just to know that God has provided a way, that He loved us so much that He sent His only Son, should be enough to satisfy us. Simeon’s whole being longed for the moment of His coming.

Consider: Today we should also long, with the same intensity, for His return. Come quickly Lord Jesus! Is that your heart’s cry?

**April 29 Morning**

Joshua 21:44-45 *44 The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them.45 Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.*

In the eyes of the people, God had provided everything He had promised them. He had given them rest from their enemies. He fought for them and gave them victory. Is it any different for us today? Will the LORD fight your battles for you and keep all His promises to you? Absolutely! You can count on it. It may not always be in the way you imagine or be easy. Battles are good for us.

In the history of Israel, this period seems to be their most faithful period. These years of battles and victories seem to have the least amount of compromise and murmuring. Does that tell us anything? We wonder why life seems to be so full of struggle. Perhaps we would be worse off if we had no battles before us to keep us on our knees, asking for God’s help.

We often wonder if we will ever see the end of conflict, a time when the battles are over, and we can rest. Yes, it is coming. The LORD will give us rest, but not in this life. Oh, you will have breaks between battles, but we need the battles to grow and move forward. We need to keep taking the land as long as we are here. When there was no outer enemy to fight, Israel’s history showed that they turned inward and lost the spiritual battles with idolatry and became discontent. Thank God for the battles. Keep taking the land. In God’s time you will have rest on every side.

Prayer: Lord, help me appreciate the battles, knowing they are for my eternal good.

**April 29 Evening**

Luke 2:36-38 *36 There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*

Yesterday evening’s devotion was about Simeon who was waiting to see the Messiah before he died. A few verses later we have the prophetess, Anna. Eighty-four was a very old age for that time period. This sincere woman never left the Temple! Can you imagine never leaving your church grounds? Her life was given completely in service to God.

When she saw Simeon take the baby and begin to praise God, she knew in her spirit that this was the One. Then she hurried around to tell all the others that were waiting for the Messiah. When God is about to do something, He calls His children to pray it into the earth. There may have been a whole group of these praying saints.

It is interesting that the word ‘redemption’ is used instead of ‘salvation’. Jesus was going to pay the price to set them free. This was not the time for political upheaval. It was the hour of spiritual exchange.

The Anna ministry is a much-needed ministry today. There are a growing number of retired folks with time on their hands and a desire to serve God. The church has taught them that service means going out and doing some physical service, and so they feel as though they can no longer serve. Imagine an army of Anna’s in the Temple day and night in prayer and fasting! That would change the spiritual climate in our churches, cities and nations. Perhaps you know of someone who you could encourage with Anna’s testimony. There are an increasing number of “prayer furnaces” in which day and night prayer is going up. Perhaps their call is to one of these, or in their own church, to really devote themselves to prayer. (Colossians 4:2)

Consider: Is God calling you to such a ministry?

**April 30 Morning**

Joshua 22:7b-8 7b*When Joshua sent them home, he blessed them,8 saying, "Return to your homes with your great wealth--with large herds of livestock, with silver, gold, bronze and iron, and a great quantity of clothing--and divide with your brothers the plunder from your enemies."*

The tribes of Gad, Rueben, and half of Manasseh had done their duty. They stayed the extra five plus years fighting alongside their brothers to secure a place for them. Because of their integrity in keeping their word they were rewarded with their portion of the spoil from the enemies. They were not going back empty handed.

Those that stayed behind to watch out for their territory and protect the women and children were to receive their share of the spoils of war. They hadn’t risked their lives to capture it, but they did do the job assigned to them. I imaging the homes these men returned to were in much better shape because of those who stayed behind.

Not everyone is called to go out on the field and win the masses. We are all called to be a witness. We are all called to be servants. Some are called to stay by the stuff and keep the home fires burning. Will they receive any less than those who risked their lives for the sake of the Gospel? Not if that was their calling. If they were obedient to God where they were, they will share in the spoils of war. They will receive their portion. It is not the role you fill but your faithfulness in doing what you are called to do. Remember, Christ says, “Well done good and FAITHFUL servant.

Consider: Do I recognize the victory belongs to all God’s faithful servants?

**April 30 Evening**

Luke 2:48-49, 52 *48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." 49 "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"*

*52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*

We have very few accounts of Jesus’ life from birth to thirty years of age. These verses at the end of Luke are all we have to go on. In the tradition of that day, a man was a disciple under a master until the age of thirty, then he was ready to be an instructor. Jesus needed to grow and learn just as you and I do. The author of Hebrews tells us that He learned obedience through the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8). The last verse of today’s text tells us He grew in wisdom. The humanity of Jesus experienced learning and growing as we do.

In the process of growing up, He was probably around the age when a young Jewish male was then considered one of the men, when the family went to one of the religious feasts in Jerusalem, the Feast of Passover. This year, Jesus was no longer considered a child, so He began to ask the religious leaders questions and answer theirs. Verse 47 tells us that they were amazed at His understanding of the Scriptures. Jesus’ mind was fully yielded to the instruction of the Holy Spirit. They probably wondered which Rabbi Jesus was being taught under. Rabbi means teacher. Jesus was listening to The Rabbi, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ parents were headed back to Nazareth and thought Jesus was playing with relatives. After a while, they grew concerned and headed back to Jerusalem. Mary probably knew right where to look, in the Temple. He had “wasted” their valuable time and worried them. Jesus responded, *"Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"* Jesus knew His unique call and mission even from that early age.

Jesus went home with His parents and submitted Himself to them as an obedient child until His ministry began. His life, which overflowed with love, joy, peace and patience, gained favor with God and men. He patiently learned and awaited the call for His mission to begin. If you are in a learning period, don’t be overly concerned about lack of ministry. The present time may be for learning and growing.

Prayer: Lord, help me to grow in wisdom and learn through the things I suffer.

**May 1 Morning**

Joshua 24:15 ***15*** *But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."*

It seems as though some of the Israelites still had little golden “gods” that their parents had taken from Egypt. Archeologists suggest that they were very small, one to three inch long gold images of cows or other creatures. They thought of them like some today think of a good luck charm. Joshua was about to die, and he told them to get rid of those things. Amazing how gracious God had been to allow that compromise for so long! Now Joshua was saying that if you can’t give them up, go worship them, but I’m not going to.

You have to come to a crossroad where you must decide once and for all. Make up your mind. Choose today! Pick between the gods of Egypt and the Amorites, or JHWH! My family is going to serve JHWH!

Standing on the fence is really not serving Jehovah. He will have no other gods before Him. Life is about making this choice and then carrying it out to the end, as Joshua had done. Have you settled the issue in your heart? Have you chosen to serve the LORD? Are you sticking with that choice with 100% commitment?

The future of the nation depended on their choice that day. Your future depends on your choice. If you are reading this, God has probably made His sovereignty known to you. If you have not already made that commitment Joshua made, do it today.

Consider: Choose! See that your family chooses. Then live the rest of your life in service to that commitment.

**May 1 Evening**

Luke 5:4-5, 8 *4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."*

*8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me,*

*Lord; I am a sinful man!"*

Jesus may have been speaking in the Bay of Parables near Capernaum. It is a natural amphitheater. From the deck of Peter’s boat, thousands of people could have heard Jesus speaking. Once Jesus was done ministering to the crowd, He knew it was time to convince Peter once and for all that he needed to give all else up to follow Him. He asked Peter to go back out onto the lake. Peter knew fishing. The fish come up in the cool of the night, not in the heat of the day. He has been doing this all his life. He’s tired, and experience says that it will be a wasted effort. Peter had known Jesus since Andrew introduced him down south at John’s ministry on the Jordan. Peter probably saw Jesus do some healing miracles at the first Passover of His ministry. He saw his mother-in-law healed instantly. He respected Jesus and would do whatever He asked.

When he lowered the nets, they were instantly swamped with fish. The nets were loaded to the breaking point, and others had to come help haul in the load. Suddenly Peter realized something that hadn’t sunk in before. This man, Jesus, is not just a prophet. Creation obeys the Creator. Now respect is not quite enough. Reverence is more appropriate, if not outright worship. Who could do such a thing but God? A revelation of the majesty of God also reveals the depravity of self. Peter’s response is not, “Now I will follow You!” but “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” Then Jesus could call him out of fear of failure to faith in the ability of God to transform and work with him.

Consider: Have you gone from respect to reverence and worship? Have you seen that Jesus is Lord of all? Do you see how unworthy you are to be in His presence? Then He can call you to His purposes.

**May 2 Morning**

Judges 6:12,16 ***12*** *When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said,*

*"The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."*

***16*** *The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the*

*Midianites together."*

Just as God had promised, oppressors came to afflict Israel when they began to worship other gods. The oppression was so severe and the oppressors so ruthless that they had to hide food in caves so they could survive. Then they began to call out to the true God.

The angel of the LORD is Jesus. You will notice He is later called LORD (YHWH). Jesus is the manifestation of God (Colossians 1:15). Jesus declared He was with Gideon and called him a mighty warrior. Gideon was hiding in a wine press to thresh his grain and yet the Lord called him a mighty warrior. God sees what He is making us into. What does the LORD call you?

Gideon is not so sure it is the LORD. If he is to take on this challenge to rally Israel, he knows he must have the LORD with him. The LORD promised to be with him, just as He has promised to be with us (Matthew 28:20). Whatever God asks us to do He will equip and help us to do. He calls us to be co-laborers, not lone rangers.

Gideon had his doubts and needed to be sure. The LORD allowed Gideon to bring an offering. He then caused fire to come from the rock and consume the food Gideon had brought. God will assure us of His will and confirm that He is with us to help us accomplish the tasks He gives us.

Consider: What does the Lord call you? His presence is all we need to succeed.

**May 2 Evening**

Luke 5:16 *16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.* 6:12-13 *12 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. 13 When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles:*

Jesus lived in communion with His Father. It was more than just a time of recharging or even of getting instructions; it is a relationship of pure love (*agape*). The love of a husband and wife is a picture of such love, for Jesus said, “As the Father has loved me so have I loved you.” The Apostle Paul said that marriage was mystery about Christ and the church. So the love of the Father for the Son is like that of Jesus love for the church, which is pictured in a marriage relationship. A husband who loves his wife cannot easily be away from her for extended periods of time. He will phone her to hear her voice and know how she is doing, sharing the details of their lives. So it is with the Father and Jesus. Jesus had to meet with Him and share Himself and listen to the Father’s voice.

When it came time for Jesus to pick His official representatives (that is what the word ‘apostle’ means), He spent all night in that sweet communion. This was one of the most important decisions of His ministry, for these men would pass on the message when He was gone. Their job was to convey to the world the life and words of Jesus, especially His victory over death. Important decisions need the counsel of the Almighty. Jesus’ example shows us how to deal with our difficult decisions. No one can stay up every night and pray, but when we are at a crossroad in life, we would be wise to follow Jesus’ perfect example. Don’t let the need for directions cause you to miss the main purpose of prayer. It is in the sharing of your life with your Father. The goal is to hear His heart, not receive a “to do” list. Then you will know what to do.

Consider: How is Jesus’ example of prayer different from your experience? Old habits die hard. How can you allow your prayer life to be transformed from duty into intimacy?

**May 3 Morning**

Judges 7:2 ***2****The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her,*

When Gideon sent out the word that he would lead a battle against the Midianites, there was a good response. 32,000 volunteers showed up. God was more concerned about Israel’s spiritual health than freeing them from oppression. Though the odds were still greatly against Israel, God said there were too many men. They may take credit for what God did, and then they would be back at square one, in need of an oppressor to cause them to call out to God.

Sometimes we have too much talent, too many good ideas, too much ability for the LORD’S purposes. He may let us have our numerical strength, but if it is of man, it will eventually come to naught. For Israel and for us today, God needs insane odds against Him before He really pours out His power. He had Gideon get down to the ridiculous number of 300 men to show it was all God.

We see some amazing works of man today. After gathering a pool of talent there has been great numerical success. Surely the Lord will work even through that, but a generation will tell if the fruit will remain or if we will be back at square one. When people have called out to God, and unlikely instruments like Luther or Moody were called, the fruit remains.

Never think you are too lacking in talent, or ability, or numbers. The Apostle Paul rejoiced in his weaknesses that the glory of God might rest upon him to accomplish God’s purposes (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Remember: God is more concerned about your spiritual health than changing your circumstances.

**May 3 Evening**

Luke 6:35-36 *35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

Jesus tells us that we must be like God. In Matthew, it is recorded that we are to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48). Luke is telling us that Jesus also said to be merciful, just as our Father is merciful. Jesus reason presented to us is that our reward will be great. That is here on the earth and especially in heaven. How can you treat others with the generosity that God treats us? That is only possible when you see that God’s resources are at your disposal.

Our natural tendency is to withhold, especially from the ungrateful and those who would take from us. Jesus says that we are to be like God is to us. How often we are ungrateful! How often we receive good from Him when we do not deserve it. If God were to use our justifications for not giving, we would have absolutely nothing. Once we realize that the source of all things is God, and that He has commanded us to be as generous as He is, then we can loosen our grip on our possessions and emotions and give like He gives. It is only in reflecting His goodness that people can see the goodness of God and His glory in the earth.

Are you making excuses for withholding love, forgiveness, finances, and assistance to those in need? Then you are falling short of the glory of God and that is sin. You are not passing on the generosity that God is pouring out upon you. So, loosen up your grip. Look at the Father and His generosity, not the sinner and their ingratitude. Be like the Father is toward you and people will see the glory of God. They may take advantage of it, but that is not your concern. Yes, use wisdom, but don’t justify refusing to do good. Sons are to resemble their Father.

Consider: God wants you to be like Him in your realm of influence today.

**May 4 Morning**

Judges 7:13-14 ***13*** *Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. "I had a dream," he was saying. "A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed."****14****His friend responded, "This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands."*

Gideon was still uncertain about taking this vast army with just 300 men. The Lord had appeared to him, consumed his offering, made the fleece dry and the ground wet, the ground dry and the fleece wet, but still he needed more reassurance. Remember this is the guy that the Angel of the LORD called a mighty warrior. Finally, God told him to go down and listen to the conversations in the tents. He snuck into the Midianite camp and heard the above story. Some people call that a coincidence. I call it a Godincidence. If God is the God of all, then the things I hear and the situations I run across are from His hand. I need to recognize them as such.

Finally Gideon had the confidence that God was giving the instructions. Don’t be discouraged if you need extra assurance that God is in something. He is more than able to show you He is. Just be sure you are open to Godincidences revealing His will. Once you know it, don’t make excuses, act.

The LORD went ahead of Gideon and prepared the way for the victory God was about to bring. He goes ahead of you, too, when you are walking in His will and following His leading. Trust and do not fear.

Consider: God is in the details of your life to encourage and guide you.

**May 4 Evening**

Luke 7:45-47 *45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."*

A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to dinner. Since the Pharisees were at odds with Jesus, Simon was really sticking his neck out to do this. Dinner was a time of conversation with friends, but Simon still held back many of the customary greetings for true friends. He did not wash the feet of his guest, give a kiss of greeting, or provide oil for his face.

A woman of ill repute, who had realized the forgiveness that Christ offered, came into the house uninvited. She washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. She kissed His feet and poured perfume on them. Simon began to think that he had made a mistake in inviting Jesus. What holy person would let a woman of her reputation touch them?

Jesus shared a parable about men who were forgiven, one for a small debt and the other for a large debt. Jesus asked Simon who would be most grateful. He realized the one with the larger debt would, of course, be more grateful. Jesus had shown Simon that he was misinterpreting both the woman’s heart and Jesus’ receptivity to her. Then Jesus pointed out that she had done the things he refused to do. Simon would not love Jesus as much as she did, for he did not realize the depth of his sin debt as she did. Do you?

The one who is forgiven much, loves much. As you open yourself to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, you see the real ugliness of the old nature. The greater your understanding of your depravity, the more you will love Jesus for the forgiveness that only He could bring. Even Christians, because of the pain, often avoid the light of conviction. We should welcome that light if we desire to love Him more.

Consider: Have I been welcoming the light of conviction?

**May 5 Morning**

Judges 7:20 *20 The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"*

What a fascinating plan the LORD gave them. Each of the 300 men took a pitcher with a torch inside in one hand. In the other was a trumpet. On cue, they smashed the pitchers and the light shown out. With the other hand they blew their trumpets and then shouted, *"A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"*

The enemy was thrown into a panic thinking that each light led a company of soldiers. Frightened in the dark, they killed one another. The dream Gideon had overheard came to pass. What sword were they shouting about? It was the Word of the LORD that they were faithfully obeying.

We have a treasure in jars of clay. It is the Light of the world. We seem to be totally outnumbered at times. But we keep on obeying the Word and believing. We become broken vessels and the light shines out. We blow the trumpet of the Gospel and the enemy (spiritual powers) is thrown into confusion. In the darkness, the enemy does not know who is a friend and who is a foe. He ends up defeating himself. It is not as if we do any great thing. God gets all the glory. We are outnumbered and outgunned, but we just obey and watch God work. If God was faithful to Gideon, to give Him the plan, and encourage Him that He would bring it to pass, will He be any different with you?

Trust God to bring the victory as you obey Him.

**May 5 Evening**

Luke 8:16-18 *16 "No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. 17 For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. 18 Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."*

What do you have? You only have what you have received. You receive physical things and spiritual things. The physical will perish; the spiritual will last. The physical does not transform the soul; the spiritual does.

How do you receive the spiritual? It is usually through your ears. In Jesus’ day, when many could not read or afford to purchase a manuscript, it was almost entirely through the ears. What do you hear?

Many of us are familiar with this illustration as it is used in Matthew, or in the song This Little Light of Mine. Those illustrations are about boldly letting the witness of Jesus in you be seen by others. In this evening’s passage, Jesus is using it as applied to either good or evil. Others will see whatever you listen to and absorb. You can’t hide what you have become. Listening transforms you. The words go into your mind and heart and affect the way you see the world around you. Cults can transform a person’s perspective by merely isolating them from other points of view. That is why Jesus says, “Consider carefully how you listen.” He is telling us to consider not only what we listen to, but also how we listen. Do we listen with discernment? Are we sorting through what we hear to discard what is not according to God’s Word and clinging to that which is of value? Do we sort the Spirit of truth from the spirit of error? That is not to criticize, but to discern what we will receive.

Why should we take such caution? Jesus is telling us that if we receive what is good, we will receive more of the same. Our light will be visible to all. If we receive vain words, what we have believed to be of substance will prove to be emptiness. People will see our lack of substance.

Consider: What do you listen to? Consider carefully HOW you hear.

**May 6 Morning**

Judges 16:20 *20 Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him.*

Samson had walked the fence of serving the LORD and serving his lusts until it finally caught up with him. The flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. Eventually one must win. Samson could not see that flirting with evil would cost him so much. He’d been shown mercy by God again and again and thought that it would never end. This time he crossed the last line. “My Spirit will not always strive with man,” the Lord said. Delilah conned him into telling the source of his strength. Did he really think he would get away with it again, or was he hoping he would be normal so that he could know if she genuinely loved him? Whatever was going on in his mind, he thought he was still anointed when he woke.

What a warning this is to us! We go on flirting with disaster, compromising with evil and then we jump up thinking the anointing is still upon us. We go out to battle and find we have no strength. His eyes were put out. It was symbol of his spiritual blindness. He labored for years for the enemy, another symbol of the spiritual oppression we suffer when sin masters us.

Finally when put on display at a feast to the enemy’s god, he gave himself in one last act of service to God. What a price he paid to see in the Spirit. What a price he had to pay to be free from bondage to the enemy. Still, his death took a greater toll upon the enemy than his life. God gives second chances.

Consider: Flirting with evil will eventually extract a painful price. Quit now!

**May 6 Evening**

Luke 9:61-62 *61 Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family." 62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

To follow, to be a disciple of Jesus, is the highest calling anyone can have. In the passage for this evening, a man asked to become one of Jesus’ followers, *“but first…”*. Once the realization has come to us that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, there can be no *“but first.”* It is comparable to saying, “I know that You are my Creator to Whom I owe my very being, but there is a portion of my life that I wish to remain lord over.” “I will make you a close second to my parents”, or whatever is of primary importance to you.

There can be all kinds of affairs in a marriage. We usually interpret it as unfaithfulness with the opposite sex, but a woman can have an affair with money, with her children, or with her parents. The more common affairs with men are their work, position, possessions, or vacations. The man in the text above wanted to become a part of the bride of Christ, but wanted to keep his love for his parents first. Is it possible that you are being unfaithful to Jesus? Imagine how that breaks His heart.

The plowman had to keep his eyes fixed far ahead in order to keep the row straight. If he looked back, the oxen would pull in whatever direction was easiest, and the row would end up a curve. In our life in Christ, we dare not look back on the things that were once first in our lives. The old loves must stay in our past to plow straight. Service in the kingdom of God demands a forward view into eternity.

Consider: Keep your eyes on the goal. The glorious future ahead is incomparably greater than anything we valued in the past.

**May 7 Morning**

Judges 17:6*6 In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.*

This is a sad commentary on that time. The judges were warrior rulers. Some of them had a heart after God, but others did not. The spiritual condition of the nation was at a low point. The Law was not enforced and everyone did as they saw fit.

Our world is not much different. In fact, that is the new teaching of our culture. “Whatever you think is right for you is the way you ought to go.” We still have laws that came from our Judeo-Christian culture but we are slowly doing away with many of them, calling them antiquated.

But this is a trend of our society because it is the trend of fallen man. He wants to do his own thing, be his own lord. He considers laws and restrictions unnecessary chains if they keep him from his desires. So here is the heart check: Are you a part of this trend? Is your king the King of kings?

This is what makes the difference, the presence of a king that enforces the laws. If you know your King, hear His voice, and are disciplined by His Spirit then you no longer do as you see fit. There is order and purpose to your life. You live at the direction of your King.

Consider: Are you submitted to the King today or doing as you see fit?

**May 7 Evening**

Luke 10:19-21 *19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." 21 At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.*

Jesus had just sent out the 72 to go before Him healing the sick and preaching that the Kingdom was approaching. Such a demonstration of the power of God surely prepared people’s hearts for Jesus’ visit. This was an army with real power preparing for the entrance of the King. They returned to Jesus with the news that even the demons had to submit to the name of Jesus. Then Jesus uttered the above passage. We can easily take a portion of scripture out of context and do exactly what the people of Jesus’ day did. They were always taking Jesus’ symbolic expressions literally. Snakes and scorpions represent the evil forces that are a part of the power of the enemy. It can also be true in a literal sense as we see in the testimony of Paul on the island of Crete, but that is not the focus of the context.

Then Jesus tells them not to get too carried away with the power and authority that comes with His name. Power can go to your head. Instead, He tells them they should be enthusiastically joyful that their names are written in heaven. There is the Book of Life in heaven with the names of all the redeemed children of men. Do you know that your name is written there? That should give you great joy every day.

It’s not that we are the great wise and mighty people of the world. On the contrary, Jesus was rejoicing that God had chosen the simple. Today, man boasts of His education, title, and accomplishments. Careful! Jesus was thanking the Father that this power was given to simple, childlike people. It was the wise and learned that did not see.

Remember::Keep learning, but remain a simple child of God who rejoices that your name is written in heaven.

**May 8 Morning**

1 Samuel 2:2 ***2*** *"There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.*

Hannah was barren and her husband’s other wife tormented her because of it. In those days, to be barren was to appear to be cursed of God. As she was pouring out her heart to God in anguish at the tabernacle, the priest, Eli, thought she was drunk. He rebuked her for it but then heard her explanation. He asked the LORD to grant her request. She promised to give the child back to the LORD. She named her child Samuel. After she gave birth, she sang the prayer in 1Samuel 2. That prayer includes the verse for today.

We can know that even though we are mortal and of little account, the Creator hears our prayer when we pour out our hearts to Him. Hannah did not have to have children to have a meaningful life, but she thought she did. God heard the pain of her heart. What an awesome God we serve. He owes us nothing and we owe Him all, yet He hears our prayer and is concerned with our pain.

Hannah declared God to be uniquely holy. That is very true. He is the standard of holiness. We can be credited with the righteousness of Christ and be made holy in God’s eyes, yet He is uniquely holy. Our holiness is received, whereas His is inherent. He has always been holy throughout time. We became holy at a point in time.

He is always the same, and so, He is our Rock. No other god concerns himself with man in love and mercy like our God. No other god is forever perfect like our God. The answer to Hannah’s prayer filled her with an awareness of the wonderful God she served.

Consider: The answers to our prayers should fill us with wonder too.

**May 8 Evening**

Luke 10:40-42 *40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" 41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

There was a family of two sisters and a brother that lived in Bethany, just two miles from Jerusalem. The gospels tell us of a number of times in which Jesus stayed there. John said that Jesus loved these three (John 11:5). This passage is introduced with a statement that this is Martha’s home. She felt the responsibility to entertain and provide the meal, but she wasn’t getting any help from her sister, Mary. Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to His words. Martha asked Jesus to intervene and tell Mary to give her a hand*. “Lord, don’t you care?”*

Things often seem clear from our human perspective. “I’m doing ALL the work!” Doesn’t anyone care? Doesn’t God care? We forget that service is a privilege, and then we have the wrong attitude. If Martha understood the blessing of service and the idea that Jesus was serving them at that moment, she may not have felt the need to insist on help.

There is a cultural perspective we should consider in this story. Women were not usually allowed to be in on a men’s group discussion or teaching session. The culture expected Mary to be in the kitchen. Jesus doesn’t yield to the culture of the world. He pointed out that Mary had chosen a good thing. He wasn’t going to take that from her for culture’s sake, or for Martha’s misconception of the need to have a meal done at a certain time. There is a time for service, and a time to receive the service of another. There is a time to work, and a time to listen. Find the joy of the LORD in each. Don’t look down on someone who is not in sync with your current calling. When we get to John 11, we will see Martha as the one who shines brightest by expressing her faith in Jesus.

Remember: If you want to take time at Jesus’ feet, you have chosen the good thing that will not be taken from you.

**May 9 Morning**

1 Samuel 3:10 ***10*** *The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."*

Little Samuel was raised under Eli in the Tabernacle. His older brothers (Eli’s real sons) were very wicked. The word of the LORD was rare, and there were few visions. One night Samuel heard the Lord call his name but thought it was Eli. This was the first time he had a personal encounter with God. After asking Eli if he called a second and third time, Eli finally realized God was calling Samuel. He told Samuel to ask the LORD to speak, for he was listening.

Do you know that the LORD knows your name? When He calls your name there is a sense of His personal relationship with you. You are not just one of the many but personally known by God. He wants to commune with you personally.

Eli told Samuel the perfect response. When God calls our name, we need to invite Him to speak to our hearts. We need to present listening ears out of respect and reverence. I believe the LORD wants to speak to us more than we are willing to listen. The LORD is seeking out those who will listen.

What He has to say to us is often something we would prefer not to hear. It often shakes our comfort as it did with young Samuel. The LORD was telling Samuel of the impending judgment about to fall on Eli for not restraining his sons from their wickedness. It would be a guiding principle in Samuel’s life. He knew he had a responsibility to act in the restraint of evil.

Consider: When God calls your name, are you willing to listen?

**May 9 Evening**

Luke 11:8,13 *8 I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs*

*13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*

Jesus told a parable about a man who had a guest arrive late in the evening. In the Middle Eastern tradition, the community is to see that its guest is well received. The reputation of the community is at stake. Is the community hospitable or hostile? The man went to a neighbor who was sleeping. He asked for bread to set before the guest. We may have a problem with translation at this point. The word translated “boldness” is, in the original, the negative of shame. The person of Middle Eastern tradition would lose face if he did not get up and provide the bread. He would have been letting down the entire community.

When we look at the passage in this light, it may be teaching us something other than persistent knocking on God’s door. The man who is without shame may be the one who was in bed. It may be telling us that God has a reputation. He has His name to defend. If an evil man will get up for the reputation of the community, how much more will God respond to your prayers for His great name’s sake. If you, an evil person give good things to your children because it is expected of fathers and mothers, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

Do you want to walk with God? Do you desire to live a life pleasing to Him?

You just need to ask your gracious, loving Father, and He will surely give you the Holy Spirit. It is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives that empowers us to be more like our Father in our words and actions. Have you stumbled in an area? Ask the Father to give you the Holy Spirit to help you crucify the flesh and walk in holiness. He will give you Himself, not because you are bothering Him, but it is His very nature to do so. It is His character to give good things to those who ask. Expect the answer to come in an even greater measure than your original request. Why? Because God is the giver of all good things. His name is on the line. He is always true to His nature.

Remember: If you ask for good things, you can expect God to answer. Take a moment to ask for good things.

**May 10 Morning**

1 Samuel 5:11-12 *11 So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and said, "Send the ark of the god of Israel away; let it go back to its own place, or it will kill us and our people." For death had filled the city with panic; God's hand was very heavy upon it.12 Those who did not die were afflicted with tumors, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven.*

Israel was defeated in their first skirmish with the Philistines. Instead of seeking God as to why, they brought the Ark of the Covenant into battle, like a big lucky charm. The evil sons of Eli carried it. They were defeated. Eli’s sons were killed, and the Ark was taken.

Upon hearing the news, 98-year-old overweight Eli fell backward, broke his neck and died. Did he think God could not take care of the Ark? Sometimes we think everything is lost, but we forget God can fight without us. Samuel was still in Shiloh and the LORD could bring back the Ark all by Himself.

One god of the Philistines was a fish-man, Dagon. They were sea voyaging traders and so they created a god that looked like a fish but had a head of a man and hands. When the Ark was left before the Dagon statue, the next morning found Dagon collapsed and the head and hands had broken off.

Everywhere the Ark went there was death and sickness. Finally they had enough. They set the Ark on a cart with gold presents. Two cows were taken from their calves and harnessed to the cart. Crying all the way, they took the Ark back to Israel.

God showed that He could take care of His own reputation. In the process He showed that Dagon was just a statue. The Israelites had to see that the defeat was because of their sin not lack of power in God. We learn that God can redeem even the worst situations all by Himself.

Consider: God can defend his own reputation.

**May 10 Evening**

Luke 11:30-32 *30 For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. 31 The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here. 32 The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.*

When the heart of man is stubbornly hard, God will give signs. In Solomon’s day, the world was awed at the wisdom and blessing of God upon Solomon. A heathen queen traveled a great distance to hear his wisdom. If that Gentile would make such an effort to learn truth, what should we do when someone greater than Solomon is present?

Jonah was sent to the Ninevites. They were brutal Gentile enemies of Israel. His three days in the belly of a great fish was a sign to them of how much concern God had for them. Someone greater than Jonah came to the Jews of the first century. He gave them a similar but more amazing sign. He lay dead for three days and rose to life.

We could say that this applies to the Jews of the first century. It surely does, but One equally great is here today. The Holy Spirit has been poured out. He is greater than Solomon and Jonah. Are we listening to Him? How far will we go to hear His voice and learn the truth? Are we considering the many signs He gives us? Are we hearing His preaching, otherwise known as conviction, encouragement, and comfort? Will the Queen of the South and the Ninevites rise up and condemn us for not hearing and believing, or have we joined their ranks as repentant Gentiles? We will all rise at the judgment on one side or the other.

Prayer: Lord, give us eyes to see and ears to hear the Holy Spirit in our day.

**May 11 Morning**

1 Samuel 8:6-7 ***6*** *But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD.****7****And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.*

Samuel didn’t have a good model in Eli, as far as raising children went. Samuel’s own sons were like Eli’s. The people asked for a king so they wouldn’t be stuck with the evil sons of Samuel leading them. It is the nature of men to want a human leader they can see. We always look for our superman. We want someone visible to follow. But when man has that much power and influence, he almost always becomes corrupt. The temptation to take advantage of the situation for personal pleasure is too great. Then you have the great disappointment of all who have elevated him and proclaimed his worthiness.

The grace of God allows leaders who are worshiped to fall. That failure turns our eyes back to God. Samuel warned them that this would happen. Still, they insisted on having a king. Samuel was displeased. He knew something in his spirit was saying that this was terribly wrong. God helped him understand by explaining,

*“It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.”*

Churches and ministries, heed the heart of God. One elevated man with final say and authority is the way of man. It is a rejection of God. God has always worked through men whose hearts are after Him, not the man with the best capabilities of being a CEO. Look at the disciples Jesus chose. They were a group of equals, with the real Leader, Jesus. The church should be the same today. The most capable of being a CEO among them was Judas.

Consider: Exalting man leads to disappointment. Exalting Christ keeps us on track.

**May 11 Evening**

Luke 12:15,20-21 *15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

*20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' 21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."*

Greed comes in many forms. It is one of the most destructive driving forces of this world. Since Jesus has called us out of the world, greed should not affect our decisions. As we are not yet made perfect, there is the temptation to allow greed back into our hearts. The whole advertising industry is geared toward provoking all kinds of greed. Their goal is to get you to believe that life does consist of what you possess. They tout happiness as possession of their product.

Jesus illustrated His point with a parable. A rich man had a great harvest. He did not have enough room to store it, so he decided to build bigger barns. He thought that for years he could live in luxury and enjoy life, but God knew he was about to die. What happens to all that wealth then? There is an end for every man and woman. You have never seen a moving van behind a hearse. What you take with you is your character and your relationship with God. To live for the temporal things of this life is to be a fool.

Are you rich toward God? If your focus is eternity, greed will not be able to work its way back into your heart. Is there something you think you must possess? Ask yourself if it will help you be rich toward God or if it is greed in disguise. Set your heart on things above and not on things of the earth.

Consider: How can I become increasingly rich toward God.

**May 12 Morning**

1 Samuel 10:6-7 ***6*** *The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person.* ***7*** *Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.*

Knowing Saul’s end, we tend to overlook his beginning. He was a humble man even though he was large in stature. Samuel told him of all the signs that would come to pass that day to confirm that it was the LORD who had chosen him to be king. When Saul met the prophets with their musical instruments, prophesying, the Spirit of God came upon him in power and he prophesied. Samuel said that at this point he would be changed into a different person. Verse nine says that God changed Saul’s heart.

Once our heart has been changed, we have godly desires. We are open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Some people search for some special leading when God is leading them continually. It is true that we must still discern what is of the Spirit and what is of the old nature, but that is usually quite evident. If we get off track, we receive that check in our spirit that warns us something is amiss. So we proceed with each day in faith believing God is leading us by His Spirit.

Now that we see that Saul’s beginning is so much like our own, we also have a warning. In the devotions to come, we will see a turning aside from the known will of God. We will see the increase of pride. Finally we will see his sad end. Nevertheless, throughout this time, he was God’s anointed. It is a warning for us to heed the checks from the Spirit and remain in obedience.

Consider: A great beginning does not insure a great end. Persevere!

**May 12 Evening**

Luke 14:31-33 *31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.*

To be a disciple of Jesus means that you will pay a great price. Jesus’ first example of the price in the passage is family. Family members will challenge Jesus’ place in your life. They will demand that they be first. Your love for them and your Savior will have you sharing the truth of His life with them. When they see your attachment to Him, they will feel their position in your life is threatened. By their choice, relationships will be severed.

Jesus’ second example is of a builder. A building takes careful planning. The complete costs of material and labor must be calculated. If this is not done, the project will be half completed. Everyone who passes that way will see your shortsightedness. It is a monument to your failure to count the cost. How often we see people follow Jesus for a time and then return to the world.

The third illustration is of a king going to war. If you are outnumbered, you should send a delegation to ask for terms of peace. Jesus’ illustrations are about thinking ahead and preparing for what is inevitable. If you choose to follow Jesus as a disciple, you will face loss. You must forsake all things if you desire to follow.

Anything you cling to will be a challenge to His lordship in your life.

You can be a believer and not a disciple. You can accept His work on the cross in your place but not go on to learn from Him. A disciple is a learner. To learn you must follow. To follow you must let go of all other things that would compete for first place in your heart. According to Matthew’s gospel (28:19,20), Jesus asked us to go out into the world to make disciples, not just believers. Have you counted the cost?

Consider: Are you willing to let Jesus take the place He deserves in your life and begin learning of Him? He’s worth it!

**May 13 Morning**

1 Samuel 12:23-25 ***23****As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right.****24*** *But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you.****25****Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be swept away."*

Samuel had anointed Saul as king. Shortly after, Saul led them in a great victory. Samuel gave them a sign to help them discern what an evil decision they had made in asking for a king. Then he encouraged them to make the best of their wrong choice by seeing that they and their king serve God.

In today’s passage, Samuel comforts them with the fact that he will pray for them. He says it would be sin for him not to. We often think of sin as an evil action we commit, but it also the good that we should do but neglect.

He also promised to continue to teach them the good and right way. As Christians, we have an obligation to those under our influence, to teach them the good and right way the LORD has taught us. Israel had seen the hand of the LORD in power. Their attitude of fear, in regard to their relationship with God, was a good thing. They realized His might and holiness and their need for instruction.

*Be sure to fear the LORD and serve Him faithfully with all your heart.* We need that reminder. So many distractions would pull us away from that good frame of heart and mind. Consider the great things He has done for you. That will help you keep a heart of gratitude and put distraction in perspective. Yet if you persist in doing evil, it doesn’t matter how great a king you have, God will sweep you and your hero away.

Consider Calvary, Easter, Pentecost, and your salvation. The LORD has done great things for you!

**May 13 Evening**

Luke 15:8-10 *8 "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one.*

*Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

The religious leaders noticed that Jesus was always with “sinners.” They suggested he should find better company. Jesus answered them with several parables. The first was of a shepherd that had a hundred sheep. When one was lost, the shepherd left the 99 and searched for it. When it was found, he was full of joy.

Then he told them about the woman in our passage today. The homes in Palestine were dimly lit by small windows. A coin could easily be lost in the cracks of the floor covered in dust. Why was this such a thing of importance to her? It may have been a part of a ten coin wedding headdress. The women of that day would scrimp and save to gather enough coins to chain together ten coins that showed they were married. The coin was the equivalent of a day’s wages. If the family fell on hard times, she had this reserve to rescue them with. It would be similar to a woman losing her wedding ring today. No wonder she would search desperately till she found it.

The point of Jesus’ parable is that God is searching for the lost. He does not wait until we clean up our act and come groveling on our knees to Him. He goes out and searches with desperate love for us. He is thrilled when He finds us. All heaven has a party when one person is found. Jesus taught us how much the Father desires us to be right with Him. It is not the demanding insistence of a dictator, but the tender love of a Father that longs for your fellowship and inclusion into His family. In answer to the leaders’ question, Jesus was saying that He was right where His Father’s heart was. I wonder which mindset we have today, that of Jesus or that of the religious leaders?

Prayer: God, please give me a great desire to see the lost found.

**May 14 Morning**

1 Samuel 13:11-12 ***11*** *"What have you done?" asked Samuel. Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash,****12*** *I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering."*

The Philistines were gathering to fight Israel. Their numbers and technology were vastly superior. Samuel had told Saul to wait seven days, and he would come to offer sacrifices before the battle. Saul could see the enemy gathering and the Israelites deserting. HE THOUGHT he needed to rally the people. The time Samuel promised to come was about up. Saul leaned to his own understanding instead of obeying in faith.

Samuel arrived immediately after the sacrifice was offered and asked, “What is going on?” Saul justified his actions. He sounded very religious. “I had to seek God’s favor before the battle. I felt compelled.” But that was not what he was told to do by God’s prophet. Compelled by whom? By his own fears, reason, and doubt.

He took matters into his own hands. This began a pattern of rebellion in Saul.

Today we would probably be referring to Jesus as the son of Saul instead of the Son of David, if Saul had remained obedient to God (though of course Jesus had to come through the line of Judah). We have choices of faith throughout our life that have far ranging consequences. Do we trust God even when our eyes see great trouble? Will we take matters into our own hands, because we think God will not or cannot help? Or will we walk in faith and be blessed?

Consider: Do I respond to circumstances or to the Word of God?

**May 14 Evening**

Luke 15:17,20,22-23 *17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 20 So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

*22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.*

Jesus was responding to the religious leaders’ question as to why He befriends sinners. His first story was about one sheep out of a hundred being lost. The second is about one coin in ten. This last one is about one brother in two being lost. The emphasis is on the preciousness of each individual soul to the heart of God. Each story tops the previous one in the value of the lost thing and the joy in finding it.

This was a radical departure from the Jews’ understanding of God’s attitude toward sinners. They tended to see them as those who God was just waiting to blast away. They did not want to be near them because the judgment of God might fall at any moment and they might be harmed in the process. What a difference in attitude! No wonder they could not understand Jesus’ compassion for the dregs of society.

In this parable, the son had insisted on taking his inheritance, which would have been one-third of the estate. The father and remaining son had to live on the remaining two-thirds. The son who took the inheritance quickly wasted it on wild living and ended up in poverty. As he fed pigs, he was so hungry that he wanted to fill his stomach with the pig slop. Finally, he came to his senses and decided to go home and plead for forgiveness. He hoped his father would let him be a servant.

His father must have been watching for him, because he saw him coming and ran to him. This was very undignified for a Jewish father. Compassion had overridden his dignity. Instead of being hired as a slave, the son was given the robe of a guest, the ring of authority, and a calf reserved for the entertainment of an important guest was cooked for a celebration feast. Could the desire of God to welcome the lost into the Kingdom be any clearer? (continued tomorrow evening)

Consider: When you came to Christ, God ran to meet you!

**May 15 Morning**

1 Samuel 15:13-15 *13 When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions."14 But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"15 Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."*

Saul is still blessed of God and empowered by God to defeat the enemies of Israel. He was commanded by God to destroy the Amalekites and do as Joshua did to Jericho. He knew the story of Achan (Joshua 7). Saul has been compromising, thinking that it is not all God but that he is a pretty great guy, He just built a monument to himself. And since he is so great, he can change what God has said to fit his desires.

I’ve heard it a number of times in the stories of fallen Christians. “You don’t understand the pressure I’m under. God makes exceptions for me because of my great need. I’m in special circumstances.”

Saul saw the good plunder and decided God didn’t need it destroyed. Saul needed it for himself. When confronted by Samuel, Saul justified his sin. Here is the main difference between Saul and David. Both are anointed, both empowered, both successful, both disobeyed, but their reaction when confronted couldn’t be any more different. Saul justifies his sin. “My flesh isn’t that bad. It makes necessary choices.” David repented with a broken heart. There is the telltale evidence that a heart is either after God, or turned to self as lord.

Caution: Justifying sin ends in disaster.

**May 15 Evening**

Luke 15:28,31-32 *28 "The older brother became angry and refused to go in.*

*So his father went out and pleaded with him.*

*31 "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"*

The religious leaders’ questioned Jesus, “Why do you spend time with sinners?” He responded with the story of the prodigal son. The story included an illustration about the leaders’ bad attitude. When the younger son returned home with a repentant attitude, the father threw a celebrations feast. The oldest son was out working the fields and could hear the commotion. When he found out it was a party for his brother, he was furious. No doubt he thought, “My brother blows a third of the family wealth having fun, and Dad throws him a feast! I can’t believe it! I slave away here on the farm, scrimping and saving, so my brother can blow it all.” The father went out to try to resolve things by getting the older brother to look at the half-full glass. “You’ve got me, your father. You have all that is mine. We had to celebrate because your brother has turned from death to life. We lost him to his wandering desires, but now he has come to his senses. Don’t remain angry with him. Rejoice in the transformation.”

The religious leaders needed an attitude adjustment, a different perspective, just like the older brother had need. They were angry for the people’s sins of the past but not rejoicing in the change that was taking place in these “sinners” attitudes. How is your attitude toward the “sinner”? No doubt there are some of them in your life. Would that we could all see our own sins! This parable can help us see things from God’s perspective. What is important is that they have gone from death to life, from being lost to being found. Let’s share in Jesus’ joy when a “sinner” comes into our fellowship and enters the family of God.

Consider: Be careful not to have an older brother attitude toward those who have seen the destructiveness of sin and now come home.

**May 16 Morning**

1 Samuel 15:22-23 *22 But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."*

After Samuel told Saul the words from God, Saul still justified himself and tried to shift the blame onto his men. He added that they wanted to sacrifice the animals to God. Caught in the act, yet he makes it increasingly worse with lies and pointing the finger at others.

Finally Samuel cuts to the chase. He is not going to let this man of God condemn himself anymore by the lies coming from his mouth. Obedience is what God desires, not sacrifices. God will provide the ultimate sacrifice that will please Him, but He does not delight in the blood of bulls and goats. It is an obedient heart surrendered to Him that pleases Him. Saul had gone from the humble man who didn’t think he could do the job, to a cocky liar that defends his rebellion, even blaming those he leads to save his own skin.

God is not after our sacrifices either. He is after a heart surrendered to Him in humility. We often look for some way to please God with service or sacrifice, when God is just looking for a humble obedient heart. The work the Spirit guides us to is rarely some great sacrifice, but often many little ones. Say a word here, lend a hand there, or give a hug or an encouragement at God’s direction. We often don’t realize when we are being obedient in a way that is pleasing the heart of God. That is true humility.

Meditation: A new creation in Christ will find it natural to obey, but even a new creation can harden his or her heart.

**May 16 Evening**

Luke 16:14-16 *14 The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. 15 He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight. 16 "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.*

Jesus was teaching about using money for the Kingdom of God and not letting it conquer your heart. The Pharisees were upset with this because they loved money. Archeological evidence indicates these religious leaders were very well off. They associated wealth with the blessing of God on their lives. This passage tells us it was more than that in their hearts. They were in love with money.

What’s wrong with loving money? It’s not what God loves. We should be aligning our hearts with His true heart. Natural man is inclined to love the things that God detests. What we drool over, God is disgusted with. Claiming that money was the blessing of God was merely a justification for rebelling against God. It was a way to enhance their respect in the eyes of men while continuing to do what their wicked hearts desired. It is just as prevalent today.

Then Jesus declared a turning point in history. The Law and the prophets were the word of God to mankind up through John the Baptist’s ministry. John was the last of the prophets. Since John died, the Kingdom of God is preached. The Kingdom is about coming under the rule of the King. The King was speaking to them, but they were choosing to remain king of their own lives. Have you come under the rule of the King or does money or some other desire still reign over you? In the verse just prior to these, Jesus said, *“You cannot serve God and money.”* What do you serve? There is only One worth serving. We will all serve something or someone. Jesus is the King that loves His subjects enough to die for them. The Kingdom of God is being preached.

Consider: Are you laying hold of the Kingdom with all your might?

**May 17 Morning**

1 Samuel 16:7 ***7*** *But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

The LORD sent Samuel to anoint a new king from the house of Jesse. When the oldest was presented, a strong, tall warrior, Samuel thought surely this was the man. The Lord responded with our verse for today. From these ancient roots we have the expression, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” We are so governed by what our senses tell us. Man makes associations with things he has been through in the past. We all have prejudices of one kind or another, but God sees straight into the heart.

The sharpest looking man among us with the warmest smile and most pleasant manners may be the vilest person we ever met. The street person in dirty clothes and not a penny to his name may have a heart totally given to God. That is why the LORD tells us not to judge by outward appearances. Jesus told us to judge by the fruit produced from the life (Matthew 7:20).

If we must make a quick decision without a chance to see the fruit of the life, then we must listen to the One who sees the heart. Only the LORD can look in and give us direction. Man is quick to make judgment calls about another’s motivations or heart attitudes. That is God’s area of expertise, not man’s. I have seen the most discerning make the worst judgment calls at times. All men are fallible, but God sees the heart. He sees ours too. We don’t fool God with our outward appearance.

We would be better off to be the poor dirty fellow in the street with a heart after God than Mr. Slick that has everyone but God fooled.

Consider: Do I make judgments based on how a person appears? What does a con-artist look like?

**May 17 Evening**

Luke 16:29-31 *29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 30 "'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' 31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"*

Jesus told a story of a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. Both of them died. The rich man was in a place of torment and could see Abraham and the beggar. He asked Abraham to send Lazarus with water to relieve his thirst. Abraham said it was not possible. Then the rich man asked for Lazarus to be sent to his living brothers to warn them. Our passage today is Abraham’s reply.

They have something better than the words of a man returned from the dead. They have the Law and the prophets, the words from God that warn them. It is up to them to listen to those words. But the rich man kept pleading, insisting that someone from the dead would cause them to repent. Abraham said that they would not be convinced. If they can ignore the words of God, they can ignore or excuse a person coming to them from the dead.

It is interesting that Jesus called the poor man Lazarus, for in the future Jesus was going to raise a man named Lazarus from the dead. There were those who witnessed that event that went straight to the religious leaders. Those leaders would be determined to kill Jesus because of that miracle. Then, after Jesus rose from the dead, they still refused to believe. The Law and the prophets predicted all this, but they refused to believe them and the One who was resurrected. When Jesus told the story it must have seemed incredulous that people would not believe a person who had returned from the dead, and yet in a short time it came to pass. Man has the ability to justify anything in his own mind. We can convince ourselves not to believe. One has returned from the dead, the Victor over death. Have you allowed yourself to be convinced? The rich man said it would cause his brothers to repent.

Consider: Does resurrection convince you so that your life is changed?

**May 18 Morning**

1 Samuel 16:23 ***23*** *Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.*

The Spirit of God departed from Saul and an evil spirit was sent by God to trouble him. Evil spirits are always waiting to trouble us, but they need permission to attack those who belong to God. A spirit was given permission to oppress Saul. It would put him in a foul mood. Saul invited this spirit through his disobedience and pride. Nevertheless, he did not like the affect the spirit had upon him. Someone in his court suggested that music would cause the spirit to leave him. David was called in to play the harp. The man who has been anointed the next king was called to help Saul deal with the consequences of his choices.

It worked. Music seemed to bring the king relief. It works for us too. You’ll find that when you are in a foul mood, if you will listen to praise music, you will be uplifted, and your mind will pull out of the rut it seems to be stuck in. If, by faith, you can sing, you’ll feel much better. I have even made up songs to deal with certain attacks of the enemy. God allows this to strengthen and test us or wake us up to our sin. In many cities, you can turn on Christian radio and get instant help through the songs of praise.

Why was David’s music so effective? The Spirit of the LORD had come upon David in power. (1Samuel 16:13) A worshipping saint causes the enemy to cringe and flee. There are many stories of the wonders that praise music has done in asylums. It is a powerful tool. Use it for the glory of God.

Consider: How can I have praise music readily available for times when I am struggling?

**May 18 Evening**

Luke 17:7-8, 10 *7 "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? 8 Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'?*

*10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"*

The disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith. Jesus told them it wasn’t how big your faith is, but that just having a little faith is enough to do great things. He followed that with the supposition in our passage for today.

We are servants of the Most High God. We should be daily doing what He directs us to do. It may be providing for our family or serving on a mission field. Whatever we do, we do it to the best of our ability to glorify God. When our main service for the day is over, we do not turn around and ask God to serve us. We are the servants even if we are friends. He is God; we are creatures. He asks us to do another act of service and we joyfully submit. It is our pleasure to serve such a gracious and loving God.

In this service we can expect His assistance. He will not act against us when we are serving, but on our behalf. He will supply the tools and time and anything else necessary to carry out His request. That is faith. It is believing in our relationship and His ability. Lack of faith is to ask Him to serve us. He cares for His servants.

When a great thing comes to pass because we obeyed, we don’t deserve any credit or commendation. We were just doing what we were instructed to do, and all the impossible things were done by our Master. Faith is just doing our duty. It is required of servants. Growing in faith is to grow in the realization of our relationship. If we know we are serving the Almighty, we know He will enable us to complete what He asks us to do. What a great honor to serve the Lord of all!

Consider: Is verse 10 your attitude in serving the Lord?

**May 19 Morning**

1 Samuel 17:36-37 ***36*** *Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God.****37****The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you."*

David had been going back and forth from playing music for the king to tending his Father’s flock. His Father asked him to take some food to his older brothers and get their promise that they would share the spoils of war. When he delivered the food, he saw the enemy army send out one giant man who asked for a one on one to determine the outcome of the battle without the two armies clashing. Whoever lost would be servants of the other nation.

David inquired about the reward for fighting Goliath and spoke boldly that someone needed to kill this heathen. It was reported to King Saul who had David brought before him. David told the king not to worry. He volunteered to fight the giant. The king told David that a boy did not have a chance against a seasoned veteran like Goliath. Then David relayed his experiences of killing a bear and a lion in protection of his flock.

David had confidence in God because of past victories. He had faith that God would win this battle because this giant was defying the armies of the living God. Experience and faith told David that this lion that threatened God’s sheep would be like the lion he had slain defending his father’s sheep. You have been given victories in your past to help you have confidence in what God can do today. Mix the experience from your past victories with faith in God’s heart and take on the giants of life today.

Meditation: *“Go and the LORD be with you!”*

**May 19 Evening**

Luke 17:14-16 *14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. 15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan.*

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem when ten lepers met Him and pleaded for mercy. Jesus told them to go and show themselves to the priests. It was prescribed in the Law that if someone was healed of leprosy, they were to go to the priest and show that they had been cleansed. The word translated ‘leprosy’ covers a number of different skin diseases.

These ten men obeyed the word that Jesus spoke. It took faith to begin the journey. As they went, they were healed. Jesus will often ask us to go forward in faith when we do not yet see evidence. As we go, things fall into place and we understand that God is at work. Faith obeys without seeing. It may be that Jesus is still answering the disciples’ request in a previous verse to increase their faith. As servants, we need but obey, and God does the rest.

One man returned to thank Jesus and give praise to God. He was a Samaritan. It is interesting that the Jews allowed the Samaritan leper to be in their group. Illness and tragedy have a way of breaking down walls of pride. The one the Jews considered hard hearted and impure was the one who did the right thing. Jesus asked where the other nine were. Perhaps he asked the question to drive home the point to those who were listening that God is looking at the heart and not one’s nationality.

Jesus acted in the priest’s place declaring that he was well. He reminded the Samaritan and those listening that it was the man’s faith that made him well. Jesus spoke. The man obeyed in faith, and healing was the result. One final lesson we should take from this is our need to return to Jesus with thanks and praise to God.

Consider: Have you thanked Him today for all the answers to prayer and the results of faith in your life?

**May 20 Morning**

1 Samuel 17:45,46b,47 *45 David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied*

*46b****…*** *the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.47 All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands."*

Goliath hurried to meet David. When he saw he was just a boy, he mocked him and made boasting threats. David responded with the facts. Goliath had physical weapons upon which he relied. David declared that he fought as a representative of LORD of the armies of heaven and the armies of Israel. “The outcome of the battle,” he declared, “will show that there is a God in Israel.” David fought that the world might know God.

He declared one more reason that God would bring the victory, that everyone gathered would know that the LORD does not save by sword or spear. He is the One who determines the outcome of battle. It is His battle. “He is about to give you, Goliath, into my hands,” David was saying.

What faith David had in his God! He was so certain that he ran to meet Goliath.

For David it was a chance to proclaim the greatness of his God. King Saul needed to be reminded the battle was not about physical weapons. The fearful army of Israel needed that reminder. We do too. Though it is not a physical war we fight, we often try to solve our spiritual wars through natural solutions, manmade reasoning, instead of prayer and faith. Are you declaring that the outcome of your battle will show God is alive and well? Do you know it is not up to man to win it, for it is the Lord’s battle?

Consider: Are you fighting for self or God’s testimony?

**May 20 Evening**

Luke 18:11-14 (NIV) *11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

Jesus told this parable to those who were confident about their own righteousness and looked down on others. Spiritual pride is a devastating disease of the soul. It is like the continual use of painkillers that make us unaware of the problems going on within us. How can we know if we are afflicted with it?

Consider the attitudes in these two men who prayed.

The Pharisee prayed about himself. He thanked God that he was not like other people that he considered evil. It is good to thank God for His grace in your life, but the Pharisee is making the great blunder of comparing himself with fallen men. The standard is not men but God. In comparing himself with men only, he has missed his great sin of pride. He goes on praying about his righteousness, declaring to all in the range of his voice that he fasts and tithes. Whoops, there goes his heavenly reward. Jesus said when men praise you, their praise is your reward (Matthew 6:2).

The other man just beat his breast, recognizing he was a sinner. His request was for mercy from God. Jesus said it was this second man that went home right with God. God was his standard. The great distance between his righteousness and God’s caused him anguish. He had the true picture of his condition. Prayer is about seeing God for who He is, and in the light of that reality we see our great need. God lifts up the humble. He gladly gives mercy and grace to those who recognize their need, to those who are brokenhearted about their sin. To the proud, He will prepare a path of humiliation. That, too, is grace and mercy.

Prayer: Lord, grant us eyes to see our real spiritual condition that we might enter into Your presence in prayer instead of praying about our self.

**May 21 Morning**

1 Samuel 18:3-4 *3 And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.4 Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.*

One of the ancient covenants that remained from tribal days was this one that

Jonathan entered into with David. Jonathan had the same heart of faith in God and His ability to defeat the enemies in life. When he heard David speak, his soul resonated with the same tone of faith and courage in God. He loved him as himself. He saw his own heart toward God in David. You may have felt something like this when you heard a brother or sister share their testimony.

This covenant took the form of the exchange of clothing and weapons. It was, in symbolic style, saying that my possessions are yours and your enemies are mine. It is not written that David gave his clothes and weapons to Jonathan, but as a person of lower class and wealth, he had already committed himself to the royal family.

They had entered into a covenant to defend and provide for one another.

It is a wonderful gift of God when you find someone that shares your heart for ministry. They come alongside you with understanding and encouragement, and you do the same for them. This is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, who became a man, the last Adam, in order to come along side us. He took off his robe of glory and weapons of power to be with us. We give Him our weak and meager allegiance and He gives us His clothing of glory and weapons of light. We have entered into a friendship covenant, promising to fight side by side against our common enemy.

Prayer: Lord, help me be as faithful to You as David was to Jonathan! Thank you for those who share my heart for You.

**May 21 Evening**

Luke 17:20-21 *20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."*

The Jews believed the Messiah would lead them to victory over all their enemies and set up a Jewish nation like that of David’s. If Jesus was this Messiah, their natural question would be when He would begin this kingdom. Jesus’ answer shows that His perspective of the Kingdom of God is very different from theirs. As usual, they are thinking on very physical and temporal terms, whereas Jesus is speaking about spiritual realities that are eternal.

Jesus told them that you would not be able to carefully watch as things changed step by step. It is not an outward event. You won’t be able to point to a specific battle or political maneuver. The Kingdom is something that takes place within a person. The Kingdom of God is established in a heart when the King of kings reigns in that heart. Then that person is a subject of the King and has entered into the Kingdom of God.

You can see the transformation in the life of the person because he serves a new master. Jesus began His ministry preaching the same message as John. “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” Since the resurrection of Jesus, the Kingdom is preached. We often hear a humanist form of the Gospel that implies you get a free ticket to heaven and go on being your own king. Is that entering the Kingdom? The Kingdom has come to every heart in which the King reigns.

Consider: Is He reigning over you?

**May 22 Morning**

1 Samuel 18:7-9 ***7****As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."****8****Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?"****9****And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.*

The green-eyed monster, jealousy, reared its ugly head in the heart of King Saul. On the return from the battlefield, the maidens sang this song. Saul may have been a bit on edge because of Samuel’s prediction about the kingdom no longer belonging to him. This song stirred an ugly spirit up in him. He was the one they sang praise about before. Now, someone else is the chief person in the song, and he is credited with more than the king! Be careful with your words of praise for men.

The enemy can use them in destructive ways.

“Welcome home pastor. Your assistant did such a great job, we forgot you were gone,” a well-meaning board member says. The enemy places a wedge of competition between two people who are striving for the Kingdom of God. If one of them has an ear that will listen to the flesh, they will never be striving together again. Friendly voices have unwittingly sowed the seed of competition. Saul could never look at David the same way again.

There may have been more to it than that. It may have also been backed by the fact that Saul saw in David what he had lost. He saw the love for God and faith in God’s word that once was so real to him but now seemed so distant. He saw the humility of this young man and recognized his was gone. Those are the assets that put him on the throne. Those are the assets that make you useful to God. Don’t allow words of praise for others become that to you.

Consider: Rejoice when others pass you up in service to our King. He is the cause we fight for, not self!

**May 22 Evening**

Luke 24:27, 31-32 *27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*

*31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. 32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"*

After the resurrection, two of Jesus’ disciples were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. As they walked, Jesus came alongside them and asked why they looked so downcast. They did not recognize Him. They asked Him if He hadn’t heard the terrible news about the death of their Master, Jesus.

Then Jesus began with the Law and went on through the prophets teaching them how much was written about the Messiah and what He would endure. They finally understood what redemption really meant. That was probably the best Old Testament survey ever taught. Wouldn’t you like to have heard it? (See Jesus in the Old Testament – [www.bible-sermons.org/classes](http://www.bible-sermons.org/classes)  or the book Jesus Concealed in the Old Testament)

They pleaded with this man to come and join them for supper. When He broke the bread and prayed, they suddenly recognized that it was Jesus. Then He vanished. Did they say, “Wow, He’s alive!”? “Did you see Him disappear?” No! Their comment was on the revelation of Scripture. The Word of God was opened to them. They understood things that they had never seen before, and their hearts burned within them. To have the Scriptures opened to us by the revelation of God causes everything to become clear. We see the big picture and our place in it. We are thrilled with the wisdom and sovereignty of God.

Prayer: Lord, when we open your Word, walk with us, and open our eyes that we might see wonderful things in your law. (Psalms 119:18)

**May 23 Morning**

1 Samuel 23:16-17 *16 And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God.17 "Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you.*

*Even my father Saul knows this."*

David was going through a difficult time in his life. He had done nothing wrong or even with any impure motives, yet King Saul was hunting him down to kill him. Not only had he done nothing wrong, but he had been a faithful servant of the king, one of the best. He had fought the King’s battles, soothed him when he was troubled. He was the King’s son-in-law. There was no explanation but jealousy. David never said an evil word toward the King in response to all the evil the King intended upon David.

After some time of being an exile, David was discouraged. Jonathan had made a covenant of friendship with David. He risked his own standing to go out and find and encourage David. He helped him find strength in God. This is the best thing you can do for your discouraged friends. Help them find strength in God. He is the source of any genuine strength to go on.

Jonathan gave him the often-repeated Biblical message, “Do not be afraid.” Many times we think all our effort is in vain. If you are being obedient to God, it is never in vain. God will see you through. Your enemies will not triumph in the end. Jonathan told David of his convictions that one-day David would reign. He could sense it was to be. Perhaps you have a discouraged friend who needs help to find strength in God. You can encourage them not to fear. You can encourage them with what you see coming in their lives. They need to look forward to what God is doing and not get bogged down in the present turmoil.

Consider: Who can I encourage today?

**May 23 Evening**

Luke 24:38-40 *38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." 40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.*

The disciples were still hiding for fear that they would be crucified next. Behind a locked door they wondered what to do. Had everything they hoped been completely dashed? And what was this strange report that the ladies brought back of an empty tomb. Then the two that were on the road to Emmaus declared they had seen and talked with Jesus. What could it all mean?

Suddenly Jesus stood among them! *"Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?* Why are we so reluctant to believe? After all they had witnessed, one would think this would not be so difficult to accept. His first sign to help them believe was to look at His hands and feet. They were the signs of what extent He would go for them, for us. He presented them first, displaying the fact that we are engraved upon His hands (Isaiah 49:16).

Then Jesus challenged them to touch Him to get rid of their doubts. He told them to see that He was flesh and bone. His blood had been poured out for them. He was not a spirit floating about; He was a transformed and resurrected man whose life source was no longer blood. Wouldn’t it have been wonderful to watch the faces of the disciples as they turned from doubt and fear to utter wonder and worship?

To look at His hands and feet has the same effect on us. Every time we take communion we should look at His hands and feet and remember those wounds are still there because of His love for us. That gives us hope that our life source will no longer be blood. The life of flesh is in the blood, but one day our bodies will live by the Spirit.

Meditation: Whatever you are going through this day, or at this point in your life, hear Jesus’ ask you, *"Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?”* Look at His hands and feet, and be at peace.

**May 24 Morning**

1 Samuel 24:5-7 *5 Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe.6 He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD."7 With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.*

After all that Saul had done to David, trying to kill him with a javelin three times, promising one wife and not delivering, giving away his wife to another, and having David’s priestly friends killed, David will not do a thing against him. In fact, just cutting off the corner of his robe caused his conscience to be stricken. He recognized Saul as the one on whom the anointing of God had been placed. Even though the anointing is on David now, he still respects Saul. Perhaps David realizes that what he does to Saul will set an example for others behavior toward him when he becomes king.

Every one of your brothers and sisters in Christ has been anointed. Do you treat them with as much respect and fear of the LORD as David did with Saul? It is no different. We are given opportunities to slander our brother, even speak the truth that would damage their reputation. Are you convicted to take even a corner from their robe, so to speak? Has any of them done even half the wrongs that Saul did toward David? No? Then consider the example of David here. Remember your brother or sister has the anointing just as you do. They may be side-tracked, but that is for God to deal with. They may be in your hand, so to speak, but that is a test for you. Will you come away with a testimony like David’s? His action and words were a rebuke to his soldiers.

Consider: Are others convicted by my words and actions of respect for God’s children?

**May 24 Evening**

John 1:1-3 *1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

The Gospel of John was written decades after the other gospels were in circulation. Instead of following the pattern that the other three took, he included many things they had left out. It seems that he was writing to help the Greek mind understand who Jesus is, though his writing is rich with references to Old Testament passages and Jewish customs. He begins his gospel describing the eternal existence of Jesus as the *logos*. The Greeks thought of the *logos* as the unseen reality behind what is visible. The visible was passing, perishable, but somewhere there is the reality for all we see. It is the fundamental truth that caused things we see to be like they are. It is translated “Word” in this passage.

He described this *Logos* as existing in the beginning, being with God, and being God. He was the instrument of creation, and without Him nothing exists. What a way to start this Gospel! John is expressing the eternal existence of Jesus. In verse

14, John will tell us that this Word took human form, what we call the incarnation.

In the first chapter of Genesis we see God speaking creation into existence. The Word was the instrument of creation. The Word was with God. The Word is God.

He does not speak anything that is not completely true to His very nature.

It has been said that the first chapter of John is the most intellectual description of God ever written. A fisherman wrote it with no other education than Torah school, the aid of the Holy Spirit, and from being with Jesus for three years. The Spirit of God is telling the Greek mind that Jesus is the fundamental reality behind all things. Those things may pass away, but He will never change.

Consider: How should that affect our attitude toward the world we see around us? How should it affect our attitude toward the situations we face today?

**May 25 Morning**

1 Samuel 26:10, 24 *10 As surely as the LORD lives," he said, "the LORD himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish.*

*24 As surely as I valued your life today, so may the LORD value my life and deliver me from all trouble."*

David learned from his experience with the wicked Nabal, that the LORD is more than capable of dispensing justice. He learned from his past experience and applied it to his present circumstance. That is something we all need to do. In verse 10, David’s friend wanted to kill the sleeping Saul. This is the second time God had delivered Saul into David’s hands, but he left vengeance to God. He will let the LORD take care of him.

David knew that the way he treated the king, others would treat him when he became king. He believed in the law of sowing and reaping. If he was faithful to obey the LORD in not harming Saul, God would preserve his life. We see that in the New Testament lesson of the measuring cup. The same measure you use toward your brother will be used toward you (Mark 4:24). If you use a spoon of grace toward others, you will receive a spoon back from them and from God. David looked for the biggest measure of grace and mercy he could find, for he wanted that from others and from God. He certainly would be in need of it in the future, and he did receive it. To think you won’t need it is foolish. Be gracious toward those who have wronged you, and the LORD will be gracious to you.

Prayer: Lord, help me to trust You to deal with those that do me wrong.

**May 25 Evening**

John 1:9,11-12 *9 The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.*

*11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--*

Throughout the Gospel of John, we have the declarations of Jesus’ identity. One of those declarations is that Jesus is the light of the world. Darkness is ignorance and uncertainty. Light is clarity that reveals things as they truly are. Verse 9 clearly says that everyone who comes into the world is given light. There is no one that dies without a revelation of the light. John goes on to describe the different responses to the light that shines on everyone.

The first response is from the Jewish people (*His own*). They did not receive the light, Jesus. They were presented with light, and knew it was light, and yet chose to remain in darkness. As we will see later in John, that is not true of all the Jewish people, but of the vast majority. Many of the leaders came to believe but would not say so because they preferred to cling to their positions in that society. Claiming Jesus is THE light can be hazardous to your social standing.

The second response John tells of is that of all who did receive Him, that is, those who believed on His name. Jesus’ name means the salvation of JHWH. They believed He was indeed the salvation of God. To believe in the name also means to accept the authority the name represents. Instead of clinging to the world’s authority, they chose to yield to the authority of His name. Those who do so are given the right to become children of God. Have you decided His authority is above that of all worldly authority? Have you believed that He is indeed THE salvation of God? Then you have the right to become a child of God.

Give thanks, for you are in the process of being transformed into one who bears a resemblance to your Father.

**May 26 Morning**

1 Samuel 28:5-7 ***5*** *When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart.****6*** *He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets.****7*** *Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her." "There is one in Endor," they said.*

When man becomes unrepentant and justifies his flesh, he will abandon his standards to get what he wants. To the very end, Saul remained unrepentant and proud. Faced with a united army of the Philistines, and having vanquished David and his men, he began to fear the outcome of the approaching battle. In fear for his physical life, he inquired of God, but God wouldn’t answer him.

It is interesting to note the usual ways in which the LORD did speak to him in the past. Dreams are one way in which the LORD communicates then and now. When we don’t have the exact instruction in God’s Word, the LORD may reveal His direction in a dream. The Urim is believed to have been stones in the breastplate of the High Priest that would glow in answer to yes or no questions. The last on the list were the prophets. A prophet would have a word from the LORD for Saul, as Samuel had done in the past.

Saul had become the enemy of the LORD by disobedience and pride. He went against the Word of God in calling on a witch to bring up the spirit of Samuel.

When we know we are out of God’s will and that God is silent toward us, desperate people will try forbidden means to see the future. If God does not tell you, it is better for you not to know. Do not try to find out the secrets of God through mystical means. It only compounds the sin of rebellion against God. If you are not hearing from God, search out the issues in your heart that must change.

Remember: If you aren’t hearing God’s instruction, the problem may be in your own heart.

**May 26 Evening**

John 1:14-16 *14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" 16 From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.*

The *Logos* became flesh. (see May 24 evening) That is the greatest of all miracles. If you can accept that miracle, then all others naturally follow. If you can’t, then you have no hope of ever being right with a holy and just God. This is the truth upon which the Bible hinges. The eternal reality of God became a human being. The last half of that first sentence means He pitched His tent among us. The worship of God that Moses established was done in a tent. There the glory of God resided. Then the glory of God moved to the temple that Solomon built. Eventually the glory and presence of God left that temple because of the peoples’ rebellion against God. In the passage for today, the glory of God returned to the tent, but this time it was the tent of a human body.

The first tent of worship was built under the direction of the Holy Spirit. This tent was also, as the Holy Spirit came upon Mary. When we see the life of Jesus, we see the glory of God. The Jews thought of the glory as a shining light or illuminated cloud. Glory is a life entirely yielded to God. It is a life filled with grace and truth. We can see the glory of God in every action and statement of Jesus.

John the Baptist came to tell the world that the Messiah was coming. Though John was born and began his ministry before that of Jesus’, Jesus eternally existed in the Father. He is the I Am and lives in the eternal now.

It is the super-abounding grace of the Eternal One that brings blessing after blessing into our lives. It was this same wonderful grace that led to the incarnational display of glory and the death and resurrection of Jesus. Do you see your life being filled with one blessing after another? It is! Open your eyes to this grace that we so often take for granted, and bless the Lord.

Sing: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless His holy name!

**May 27 Morning**

1 Samuel 30:22-24 ***22****But all the evil men and troublemakers among David's followers said, "Because they did not go out with us, we will not share with them the plunder we recovered. However, each man may take his wife and children and go."****23*** *David replied, "No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us.****24****Who will listen to what you say? The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike."*

David and his men returned from a predicament of marching with the Philistines against Judah. The commanders of the Philistines feared David would turn on them so they sent them back before the battle. Delivered from that situation, they came home to find their city burned and their families taken captive. David didn’t act without consulting the LORD. The LORD sent him against the Amalekites that had burned their city. It is interesting that Saul lost the kingdom over sparing the Amalekite king, while David is about to come into power after a battle with them.

They had marched so long that one-third of David’s men could not go on. Two-thirds marched on and fought for 24 straight hours, recapturing everything and taking a huge amount of spoil. On returning to the others, some did not want to share the spoils of war. David had the right perspective. He insisted the victory was from God and so all had a right to the spoils. Those who stayed behind and took care of their home are as deserving as those who went into battle.

Some people think that missionaries and pastors will have all the heavenly rewards. They would not be where they are without the prayer and financial support of those who stay behind. The spoils will be shared by all. Even the angels in heaven rejoice over every soul that comes into the Kingdom.

Consider: We are in this together regardless of our calling. Am I doing my part?

**May 27 Evening**

John 1:17-18 *17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*

Moses was the mediator of the Law. He was the One who went up onto the mountain and met with God. He brought down the Laws of God to guide the nation of Israel to the Messiah. The Law brought a realization of our failure to glorify God. Through the Law, man could see how incapable he is and how dependent on God he must be.

When the Messiah came, He was the mediator of grace and truth. We see the grace and truth of God in His life. Moses brought the Law on tablets of stone. Jesus brought grace and truth in His very being. The life He lived and the words that He spoke were the grace and truth of God to man. Our requirement to glorify God is met in Jesus’ life.

The only One who could ever convey to us who God is, the fullness of His truth and grace, is the One who has always been with God. No one else has truly seen God. Jesus has made God known to mankind. Every other man that has tried to convey the truth of God falls infinitely short of the revelation that Jesus demonstrated with His own life and words. Whatever mediator you choose to turn to, none can come close to the revelation you see in the Gospels. Only Jesus can truly make God known to us.

If you have been looking to some other person, whether they are a Christian or not, realize that the revelation of God to your heart must be known personally through Jesus. At best, that other person can only point you to Him as I am attempting to do now. You must meet Him personally in the Gospels.

Remember: Jesus is the only One who can truly make God known to you.

**May 28 Morning**

2 Samuel 6:6-7 (KJV) *6 And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. 7 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.*

David wanted to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. He had a new cart built and had the ark put on it with oxen pulling the cart. Everyone went before the ark playing musical instruments and singing. When they had come to Nachon’s threshingfloor, the ark looked like it might tip over. One of the men alongside it, Uzzah, reached out to steady it. He fell down dead.

It seems very harsh to us today, and it did to David. The next time David moved the ark, he did so according to the Law. The priests were supposed to carry the ark with special poles. David learned that you cannot add to God’s law and expect to be free of problems. God’s instructions are for our good.

Everyone learned that the presence of God was not a little thing. If the ark had fallen and touched the earth, it would be less defiled than if man touched it! Man does not realize that his rebellious, disobedient nature is far more corrupting than dirt. We strive to keep our physical bodies clean, but the real filth is on the inside.

What lessons should we learn today from this tragic event? God’s way is the best way, and it is for our good. If He gives us instruction, it is because He is protecting and keeping us. Don’t presume to add to God’s directions or take away from them. Do not only what He tells you, but do it like He tells you.

The other lesson is to realize the holiness of God and the defiled condition of man. If we see that clearly, we will not stick our hands into God’s business, defiling it with our carnal ways and ideas. We have a great deal of ark touching in the world today. Man wants to do what he thinks is best for the church instead of waiting upon God and doing as God directs. Don’t reach out your hand even when you think it is a good thing you are doing. Follow God’s directions.

Consider: Following God’s instructions is the best thing for me.

**May 28 Evening**

John 1:29,33-34 *29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 33 I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' 34 I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."*

Throughout the Jewish history, all the way back to Abel, a lamb had been slain as a sacrifice. The lamb never really took the sins from the people. Each sacrifice was a look forward in faith to the perfect Lamb that would. It was an expression of faith that one-day God would provide. That expression of faith made them right with God. It did not take away guilt, however. Each year the atonement sacrifice was made again.

John the Baptist was sent ahead of Jesus to prepare people’s hearts for Jesus’ ministry. The Holy Spirit had given a very specific sign to John. The One on whom he sees the Holy Spirit come down like a dove is the One who will baptize people with the Holy Spirit. This One is the Son of God. John saw that happen when he baptized Jesus.

As Jesus walked by, John told his disciples, *“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”* This was the Lamb that millions of lambs throughout history were just a foreshadowing. He is God’s Lamb. He is the One God provided to be the perfect sacrifice for sin. He had to be a sinless man who could take on the sins of others and take the curse of death for that sin in their place. The time had come. The Messiah was present.

Meditation: Look! Fix your eyes on Jesus. He takes away the sins of the world, your sin and mine. What a beautiful Lamb God has provided! This is the Son of God! There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

**May 29 Morning**

2 Samuel 6:14-16 (KJV) ***14*** *And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod.****15*** *So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.****16****And as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.*

Once David saw that the home in which he left the ark was blessed, He decided to go ahead and bring it to the tabernacle in Jerusalem. This time, he had it carried correctly by the priests. As it was arriving in Jerusalem, he was so overjoyed that he leaped and danced in only an ephod. An ephod was a worshipper’s vest that was highly decorated. It may have come down to the waist or have covered the hips. Either way, his leaping and dancing about must have exposed him. Michael, Saul’s daughter, saw her husband and dancing before the LORD with the women of Jerusalem looking on and became very jealous. She put a damper on David’s joy by rebuking him when he came to bless her. She despised him and became barren.

There are a great variety of worship styles in the church today. Some would get almost as wild as David. The conservatives despise them because of it. If it is to the LORD, and only God can judge that, the conservative camp better be careful that they do not end up barren like Michael. If they are worshiping the LORD with all their heart and focused upon Him, they are pleasing the heart of God. You don’t have to be expressive to worship with all your heart, but sincere and deep emotion is often expressive.

*“Who are we to judge another man’s servant,”* the Apostle Paul wrote (Romans 14:4). The worshiper is God’s servant, and whatever style he worships in, God will be the judge as to whether or not it was appropriate. Man judges according to appearance, but God judges the heart. However you worship, let’s catch the excitement that David had for the presence of God within us. Never be complacent about that.

Consider: The Presence is in the tent of the believer’s body. Leap for joy!

**May 29 Evening**

John 1:48,50-51 *48 "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."*

*50 Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." 51 He then added, "I tell you the truth, you* *shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."*

The Apostle John gives us a description of the other apostles’ first encounters with Jesus. He describes how Philip invited Nathanael to *“come and see”*. Philip was already using Jesus’ words. Nathanael had a hard time believing the Messiah could come from Nazareth.

When he approached Jesus, Jesus said he was an Israelite in whom nothing false could be found. When Nathanael asked Jesus how He knew that, Jesus told him that He had seen him under the fig tree before Philip came to Him. It seems that this was some kind of sign to Nathanael, because he immediately declared Jesus as the Son of God. The Holy Spirit must have revealed something to Jesus of a spiritual encounter under that fig tree. We would call it a word of knowledge, but since Jesus is one with the Spirit, it would mean even more. He said, “*I* saw you”.

We sometimes wonder if God does see us in the secret place when we pour out our hearts to Him. Perhaps Nathanael was asking God to give him a sign that his prayers were heard. We’ll have to wait until heaven to find out. What we can know of a certainty is, Jesus sees us there and can let us know that He does.

Jesus then told Nathanael that seeing Him there was nothing compared to what Nathanael would see in the future. He was going to see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. That is a reference to Jacob’s ladder. Jesus was saying that He is the ladder. The angels, messengers of God, go and come through Him. He is the connection between heaven and earth. The revelation of God and His work in the world come through Jesus.

Consider: The answers you are searching for come via Jesus.

**May 30 Morning**

2 Samuel 7:11b-13 *11b**I will also give you rest from all your enemies. "'The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you:12 When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom.****13*** *He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*

David built a fine cedar palace for himself and began to wonder if he shouldn’t build a house for God. Nathan told him to do whatever was in his heart, as the LORD was with him. That night the LORD spoke to the prophet Nathan and told him to return to David with a message. Part of that message is today’s passage.

Buildings are very temporal things. The real house is the people that live in it.

God told David it was not David that would do for God, but God who was doing for David. God would establish a house for him. Jesus was a descendant from David and will reign forever. He is called the Son of David. God has established a lasting Davidic dynasty.

The house built for God, the lasting one of people, is being built by that descendant and heir. That is why Jesus told Peter, “I will build my church.” He was not referring to a building. Neither was God in this passage. The Father and Son were both speaking of those called out of the world to become sons and daughters of God. People are still trying to build God a house today. There is nothing wrong with a building, but God is after a house of living stones. He is the builder. It is built for His Name. It will be eternal. Are you a part of that house?

Prayer: Thank you Lord for making me a part of your house.

**May 30 Evening**

John 2:9-11 *9 and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside 10 and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." 11 This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.*

Some of John the Baptist’s disciples were following Jesus. Sometime between the wilderness temptation and the first Passover of Jesus’ ministry, Jesus and those disciples went up to a wedding. Cana is very close to Nazareth. A wedding is a weeklong party in the Jewish tradition of that day. The groom must have been a friend or relative of Jesus’ physical family. We can see that Jesus was concerned about these social events during His ministry.

Mary, Jesus’ mother, asked Jesus to deal with the problem of lack of wine. If the host ran out of wine before the week of celebration was up, it would be a shameful thing. At first Jesus seems to suggest that He will not do anything, at least anything miraculous, to help. He said His time had not yet come. Then He asks for six stone water jars that hold 20 to 30 gallons each to be filled with water. What changed His mind? I think we can safely assume the Spirit of God instructed Him to go ahead and act, giving Him specific instructions.

When the master of the banquet tasted the water that was turned to wine, he was surprised that the best wine was served last. When Jesus makes something, it is the best. The Spirit of God chose this to be the first miracle of Jesus’ ministry. The disciples placed their faith in him when they saw this transformation of physical matter, but it may be saying much more to us. The Apostle Paul referred to men as clay pots with a treasure inside. We are a vessel for the Holy Spirit. Wine is often used as a symbol of the Spirit. John the Baptist had preached that the Lamb of God had come to baptize people with the Spirit of God. The bulk of our physical being is actually water. This first sign signified the great work Jesus had come to begin, the transformation of mankind into vessels filled with His Spirit. He would make that possible through His death, resurrection and ascension.

Meditation: Be filled with the Spirit. God has saved the best for last.

**May 31 Morning**

2 Samuel 7:22 ***22*** *"How great you are, O Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears.*

After Nathan delivered God’s message to David, David was humbled. He asked God why He should be so good to him and honor his house so greatly. He ran out of words to say in the face of all the goodness of God. He declared that God knew him and yet He was pouring out all this goodness upon him. Then he makes the above statement. A God that could love me like this is a great God! He rules over all that is. There is none that even come close to comparing with Him. Who else could declare the future with such certainty? There really is no other god but the Sovereign LORD. We have heard the incomparable stories of what He has done.

The incomparable God does incomparable acts.

You must realize that the promises to David are yours to claim. (Isaiah 55:3) He has been just as good in setting His everlasting love upon you. He has honored you beyond anything you could ever deserve, even though He knows you. He is making you a part of His eternal home. That is such a great honor that it will take ages to fully absorb.

What an awesome God who could love us so! Indeed, how great He is! He determines all things from the beginning. There is none like Him. There is no one who will be as good to you or love you so greatly or honor you so highly. It is all for the honor and glory of His name.

Consider: We should be as humbled and awed as David was.

**May 31 Evening**

John 2:23-25 *23 Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. 24 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. 25 He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.*

This was the first Passover Feast of Jesus’ ministry. He had been going every year, but now the Spirit had directed Him to do miraculous things to confirm the words that He spoke. The Jews believed that miracles authenticated the ministry of the prophet. In Jesus’ case, He would do miracles that were beyond the scope of any prophet and some which were signs of being the Messiah.

Though the people believed in Him, He did not entrust (or commit) himself to them. He understood the nature of man. Since the Spirit had not been poured out, Jesus knew He could count on man to be self-centered and treacherous. The Old

Testament tells us that if we place our trust in man, we put ourselves under a curse. Jesus was following the agenda of the Holy Spirit, not that of man. He committed Himself to God alone. Yet, He knew the potential for God’s image in man to be restored.

Jesus did not need to learn from experience that men are evil. He knew from the time of being conscious of His condition as the Son of God in human form. When He found Himself in the fashion of a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to the Father. (Philippians 2:8) He knows our nature.

We need to understand this lesson. Even the best-intentioned men are men. Even Spirit filled men can backslide. Our trust and hope must be in God alone. We should love one another, and fellowship and work together with our brothers, but ultimately we commit ourselves to the Father. Jesus is the head of the body, and He alone can give us our instructions. We must obey Him above all the leading, programs, and schemes of men.

Knowing what is in man also means knowing what is in me. I must follow the Apostle Paul’s example of keeping my body submitted to the will of God, dying daily (1 Corinthians 15:31). It is important for us to understand what is in man. It keeps us looking to the right source, and it guards our hearts against making men into idols. It should also keep us dependent on the Lord.

Consider: Know thyself. Know the nature of man.

**June 1 Morning**

2 Samuel 9:6-8 ***6****When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, "Mephibosheth!" "Your servant," he replied.****7*** *"Don't be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table."****8*** *Mephibosheth bowed down and said, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?"*

David remembered his covenant with Jonathan. Though he was in a position of power and needed to answer to none, he knew he must answer to God. David asked a former servant of Saul if there were any of Saul’s family left. Only Mephibpsheth the son of Jonathan survived. He was crippled in both feet. Mephibosheth came fearing for his life, but David only wanted to bless him. He restored all the land that belonged to Saul and appointed the servant of Saul and the servant’s family to care for him. He also gave him a place at his table. That meant he would always eat the best and have fellowship with the King’s family. Mephibosheth was shocked. *Who am I that you would notice a dead dog like me?*

We are a lot like Mephibosheth. We are really powerless to do much. We are lame in our own way. Our family (mankind) sought the King’s life. Though Jesus is anointed King, like David, we served another. Our family lost the conflict, but He still loves us and keeps His covenant toward us. He only seeks to do us good. He calls us to come before Him, and we tremble as if He would destroy us. He says, “Fear not. I will surely show you kindness for the sake of Christ Jesus. From now on, eat at my table.

Admonition: Have fellowship with the King’s family and eat the Word provided for you.

**June 1 Evening**

John 3:6-8 *6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."*

One of the Jewish religious leaders came to Jesus at night. He probably did not want to be seen by his colleagues, because they were jealous of Jesus. He admitted that they knew Jesus came from God because of the miracles He performed. His name was Nicodemus. Let’s call him Nicky. Nicky had one thing on his mind, and Jesus knew what it was before he asked. *"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again,"* Jesus told him.

Like most of the folks in the Bible, he was thinking literally in regards to what Jesus was speaking of symbolically. To explain, Jesus spoke the passage for this evening. Flesh gives birth to flesh. A human body gives birth to a human body, but if you are going to be born from above, you must be born of spirit, for God is a spirit. Surely a religious leader like Nicky should be able to understand such a thing. Actually, it was amazing that he had a hunger for the truth at all. The religious establishment was so corrupt that power and money were the driving forces of their decisions. We’ll see Nicky later in the Gospel of John.

Jesus went on to say that the person born of the Spirit is like the wind. The word for spirit and wind is the same in the languages of the Bible. You hear the wind, but can’t tell where it came from or where it is going. The person born of the Spirit doesn’t understand God’s past working in their life, and they don’t know where God will lead them tomorrow. Life is an adventure with God. Nicky thought he knew where he came from and where he would be tomorrow. His life was all planned out. He was working his way up the ladder of power and influence, but the truth was getting in the way and nagging him with doubts about the validity of his goals.

Are you born of the Spirit? Is God free to direct your life as your Lord and Master, or are you headed in the direction you have set for yourself? Is there a question in your heart as to the validity of your goals?

Consider: Sit down with your Maker and let Him show you that a life of faith is incomparably superior.

**June 2 Morning**

2 Samuel 11:2-4a *2 One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful,3 and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"4a Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her.*

In the spring, the kings would go out to war on the enemies of their nations.

Instead of going out with his army, David sent his general, Joab. David remained in Jerusalem. It has been said that an idle mind is the Devil’s workshop. It sounds like David was sleeping in and rose to do a little peeping on his neighbors from his roof. He saw a beautiful woman bathing. Instead of turning his gaze, as would have been appropriate, he continued to look. His mind dwelt on her beauty, and he took the next step to ask who she is. The answer from his servant should have been a wake- up call, but then he took the next step and had her summoned to his presence.

We can see the string of sins, each leading to a greater one. In the season before, God had given David a great victory over his enemies. Joab was leading the forces against an old enemy, the Ammonites. Why had David decided to stay behind? He was not an old man. Was his vacation from the war a purposeful choice to indulge himself in some way? From the looking to the contemplation, to the asking, to the invitation, David was sliding down a slippery slope.

The fall of many a man of God has the same sad story. One sin leads to another. If at any time in your life you decide to stop fighting the enemy to indulge yourself, it won’t be long before you find yourself defeated. At any point, David could have stopped and realized where he was headed. He would have avoided the devastating consequences.

Consider: He didn’t choose to stop and so he paid the price. Will you?

**June 2 Evening**

John 3:14-16 *14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of*

*Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

In trying to help Nicodemus to understand His mission, Jesus related what He had come to do with a story from the Law (Numbers 21). Nicodemus studied the Law daily and would have immediately understood the implications. When the Children of Israel were complaining about their circumstances, God sent fiery serpents among them. Those who were bitten died in a short time. Moses asked God what he could do to save them. God told him to make a brazen serpent and put it on a pole. Anyone that had been bitten could look at the image and be healed.

That is the source of our medical symbol.

Jesus related this story to His mission. To be hung on a pole was to be cursed according to the Law. The brass in the image represented judgment. Jesus was saying that He would be cursed and judged so that the sin poisoned world could look to Him and live.

Why? Because God loved the world so much that He was willing to send His only Son to save the world from their certain death condition. He was the only one who could take the curse and sins of the world upon Himself and satisfy the justice of God. Those who lived before Christ looked forward in time to what Jesus would do for them. Those of us who live after the cross look back in time to what He did there. We all gaze upon the cross and in believing are healed from this deadly poison of sin. God so loved YOU that He gave His only Son, that if YOU will believe in Him, YOU will not die from the poison of sin in YOU. YOU will have eternal life.

Meditation: Put your name in place of “world” and “whosoever” in this verse.

**June 3 Morning**

2 Samuel 11:13-15 *13 At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home.14 In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah.15 In it he wrote, "Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die."*

The chain of sin that began when David stayed home instead of going into battle was carried even further. David wanted to cover up his adultery by having the husband of Bathsheba sleep with her. Then he would think her child was his own. The faithful Uriah would not sleep with his wife when his fellow soldiers and the ark of God were in tents in the battlefield. David tried harder. He got him drunk, but still Uriah was faithful. Then he sent a letter with him that gave a plan for his murder by not defending him in battle. If David couldn’t cover his sin, he’d have Bathsheba’s husband killed and take her for his wife.

King David thinks no one but Joab will ever know. God knows! David thought the letter would remain a secret. But now the world has read the substance of his letter. When we plot a sin to cover sin and think that our cunning will keep anyone from knowing, we are only deceiving ourselves. Be sure your sin will find you out (Numbers 32:23b). When Bathsheba gave birth, the nation knew, and the death of Uriah would be seen as more than a coincidence. David lost respect in the eyes of his nation when his plan was to save his good name. Our sin always costs more than we planned to pay, and takes us further than we planned to go.

Admonition: Stop the cycle before it gets uglier. Repent and ask man and God for forgiveness.

**June 3 Evening**

John 3:19-21 *19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."*

God is a just God. He will deal with men according to the revelation of the truth they have seen. John the Beloved told us in the first chapter that everyone sees the light of God. Some would personally witness His miraculous life or hear about it from those who did. We have had a revelation of the light of reality through the message passed down to us in the Gospels. Some of us have had a personal revelation of the Light. Then comes the choice of what we will do with what we have seen and heard. If there was no revealing of light, we would not be accountable, but that is not the case.

The revelation of Light will have one of two effects. The light always draws you to the truth. Then we either desire it or hate it. That is usually evident in the lifestyle we choose. If we cling to self and our own ways, we will avoid the Light. When the Light comes to visit through believers, those who love darkness are repulsed by the Light in their lives. They will find excuses to hate them also. That is why lovers of darkness will find friends who love the same, and those who love the Light will gather with others who do too.

Those who love the Light continue to come to the Light. They do not want to be deceived and go on in the darkness of their own ways. Instead, they want to be certain that what they do is done through God, so they are continually coming to the Light. Do you come to the Light of God in His Word, prayer, and fellowship to discern if what you’re doing is of selfish origin or of God?

Remember: The Light makes everything plain. Walk in the Light.

**June 4 Morning**

2 Samuel 12:10 *10 Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'*

After David had Uriah killed and married Bathsheba, God sent the prophet Nathan to David. He told him the story of a man who had one little lamb that was his only and dearest possession. A wealthy man of the city came and took the lamb from him to feed to his guest. David said that wealthy man deserved death. Nathan’s response must have stunned David, “You are the man!” David thought he had gotten away with his sin, but God loved David too much to let it go.

The real crime in sin is the despising of God. David knew God had blessed him and given him all that he had. Every victory was because of God. Every blessing was the grace of God. He already had at least three wives, but he despised the goodness of God and took what was not his to take. That is the root of all sin, a despising of God and His goodness, demanding what we want though it is not ours to take. This is the height of ingratitude. If God was a man who was that generous and good and you abused his trust, he would probably end the relationship. Thank God for being more gracious and forgiving than men!

David repented. He would now have to face the consequences. The cycle of sin would affect generations to come. The unguarded, rebellious moment would cause untold pain and suffering in David’s life and in the life of his descendants. Sin is never a little thing. One seed sown reaps a harvest of trouble.

Admonition: Guard your heart! Do not despise the Lord and His goodness.

**June 4 Evening**

John 3:28-30 *28 You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' 29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. 30 He must become greater; I must become less*.

One of John the Baptist’s disciples asked if he was concerned about Jesus becoming more popular than him. John answered that a man can only have what God gives him. If God gives a man favor or anointing, the Sovereign God of all allowed that. Who are we to question it?

John reminded them that his message had always been that of the forerunner. He was only there to announce the coming of the Messiah. Then John gave them an illustration from the marriage customs of that day. When a groom went to receive his bride, he would take his bride into her house where she was conceived and consummate the marriage. The friend of the groom (best man) would wait outside the door of the home for the voice of the groom to announce that the marriage was consummated. Then the friend would announce to the waiting crowd that the marriage was complete, and the weeklong party could begin. It was a tremendously joyous occasion.

John the Baptist was saying that he is like that friend of the groom. The bride, the people of God, belong to the Messiah, not to the friend. He is not sorrowful that Jesus had become more popular. It was like hearing the voice of the groom saying the marriage is complete. John is calling out that it is time for a party, not whining about losing the limelight. John the Baptist’s joy was complete in knowing that people were going to Jesus. It was a necessity that John’s ministry wind down, and that Jesus’ ministry take off and surpass that of John’s.

Sometimes we forget that our work for Jesus is not about our popularity but about His. People may be attracted to our ministry, but if that does not send them on to Jesus, we have lost sight of what it is all about. He must increase in the eyes of those we minister to, and in doing so we will naturally decrease. That is not a sad thing. It should be the completion of our joy.

Consider: Are the people you are influencing focused on you or Jesus?

**June 5 Morning**

2 Samuel 13:13-15 ***13*** *What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you."****14*** *But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her.****15*** *Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, "Get up and get out!"*

One of David’s sons, Amnon, was lustfully desirous of his half-sister, Tamar. His friend helped him hatch a plot to be alone with her. While Amnon pretended to be sick, he asked for Tamar to come prepare a meal and feed him. Once she brought the food to his bed he showed what he was really after. Tamar responded wisely with verse 13. If he would act honorably, she would have married him. She asked him the question we should ask ourselves when faced with lust of any kind. What about the persons affected? What will be the consequences in their lives? What about ourselves? What will be the full consequences in our own life if we give in to that desire? They had seen their father make this mistake with Bathsheba and saw the consequences. Now Amnon needed to face the truth of what might happen if he went through with his plan, but he would not consider it. He had already determined what he would do.

After raping her, he despised her. The carnal desires will paint a picture of fulfillment that is never even close to reality. Tamar’s honorable questions showed how wicked his heart truly was. He wanted to be as far away from the truth as he could get. The end of the matter will be a consequences no one could imagine.

Consider: Is some desire capturing your imagination? What about the persons involved? What about you? Stop sin before it moves from thoughts to actions!

**June 5 Evening**

John 3:34-36 *34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. 35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."*

Here is a three verse summary of the entire Bible. Jesus spoke the words of God. Of course the prophets did also, but every word that flowed from His lips was directly from God. The Spirit was given to Him without any limitation, because He placed no limitations on the Spirit. We wonder why we do not have more anointing. It is because we limit the Spirit in some area of our life. We have reservations in some unsurrendered corner that we reserve for self. Jesus had no such reservations in His heart and mind. He humbled Himself and became obedient to the Father. It is pride in our life that keeps desires and thoughts from obedience to God. We make excuses like, “I will not forgive that person”, or “I cannot do such a menial task” or “I have served enough for today”. The resistance to the Spirit limits His influence on our life.

Everything has been placed in the hands of Jesus. He can do what He wills with all creation. When you know and love Him, that truth is a wonderful realization. When you resist and despise His Lordship, that truth is a frightening declaration.

If you presently and actively place your trust in Jesus, you possess eternal life. He is Life. He is eternal. When you commit yourself to Him, He lives in you as your eternal life. You begin to see life as it truly is with the meaning and beauty it was given. The whole earth is full of His glory. But if you reject the Son of God, if you refuse the gift of life and cling to your right to rule your life for your personal pleasure, another attribute of God will be evident in your time on earth and afterlife, wrath! God’s wrath is the righteous response to the rejection of all that is good. It is justice toward those insistent upon joining that way that destroys both one’s own self and those with whom they interact. That wrath lives with you both through this life and forever. Choose Jesus! He is abundant life. He is goodness.

Consider: Surrender every corner of your heart and mind to Him and the Spirit of God will permeate your life.

**June 6 Morning**

2 Samuel 15:19-21 ***19*** *The king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why should you come along with us? Go back and stay with King Absalom. You are a foreigner, an exile from your homeland.****20*** *You came only yesterday. And today shall I make you wander about with us, when I do not know where I am going? Go back, and take your countrymen. May kindness and faithfulness be with you."****21*** *But Ittai replied to the king, "As surely as the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be."*

Absalom returned his father David’s mercy with a coup. David got wind of the revolt and fled with those who were loyal to him. David knew it would be tough, so in the generosity of his spirit, he told the foreigner, Ittai, to stay. Ittai had only recently come to Jerusalem as an exile from his own land.

Instead of taking the easy way out, Ittai chose the tough road with David. Ittai’s response shows that David’s good spirit must have won his heart. Ittai was probably exiled because of his political savy and not going along with those who led his own country. He could see David was an honest and sincere king. He chose to stay by David’s side regardless of the cost.

It doesn’t take long to develop strong friendships if you are a genuinely loving person. The world is looking for sincere people who will be honest, people that will risk their position to be kind. This is how we influence people with the Gospel. They see our sincerity, align themselves with us, and we get to tell them why we live like we do. In time, our God becomes their choice.

Consider: Our life must flow from a sincere heart before people will respond to us like Ittai did to David.

**June 6 Evening**

John 4:13-15 *13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."*

John said Jesus had to go through Samaria. There was another route, but He had to go that way. The Holy Spirit had a most unlikely appointment for Him. The Samaritans were descended from Jews who had intermarried with other nations. They had their own version of the books of Moses. The Jews looked down on them as an inferior and polluted people.

At noon, Jesus stopped at a well. He was physically tired from the journey. The disciples went on to a place where they could buy some food. While Jesus was resting, a woman came to the well. This was not the normal hour to come for water, for it was the heat of the day. She was probably avoiding running into other women. Jesus asked for a drink of water. She was shocked. Jews never use the same jars that Samaritans use for fear of defilement. “You are a Jew, and you want to drink from my pot?” He told her she should be asking Him for living water. She asked Him how He was going to get the water without a pot. Jesus answered with the verses above. Read them again.

Israel is a dry and mostly barren land. Water means life to it. Jesus had turned the physical into an analogy for the spiritual. He has life giving water for the spirit of mankind. We are dry and barren without the water of life, but if we will receive it from Him, it will become a spring that wells up to eternal life.

As through most of the book of John, we see the person misunderstand the spiritual reality. She wanted the gift so she didn’t have to come and face the embarrassment of seeing other women. She had a reputation. Jesus told her He knew her sin. She then tried to turn the subject into a religious debate, but Jesus went right to her heart with truth. Her testimony led many in her town to Jesus. He refused to buy into the prejudice of His culture about this race, women, and even about her moral condition. She was a soul that was in drought and thirsting for life.

Consider: How do you see the people around you?

**June 7 Morning**

2 Samuel 15:31-32 *31 Now David had been told, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." So David prayed, "O LORD, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness."32 When David arrived at the summit, where people used to worship God, Hushai the Arkite was there to meet him, his robe torn and dust on his head.*

As David abandoned Jerusalem, he covered his head and went barefoot to the top of the Mount of Olives. His counselor, Ahithophel, had gone over to Absalom’s side. On the way up the Mountain he prayed that Ahithophel’s counsel would be turned into foolishness.

As David reached the top, he saw Hushai. His torn clothing and dust on his head indicated his deep grief at what was happening. Hushai was one of David’s counselors also. Being an elderly man, he could not travel quickly like David’s men. David realized his prayer had been answered. He sent Hushai back into Jerusalem to oppose the counsel of Ahithophel. It was a dangerous assignment, but he took it as a willing servant of the king.

Often we pray, and God immediately sends the answer. If we are not watching and expecting the answer to be sent, we will miss it. The answer to David’s prayer was not as he might have imagined, neither is God’s answer to many of our prayers. That is why we must be alert and attune to the Spirit, expectantly looking for the answer. This prayer of David and God’s immediate answer turned the whole course of the future and was a factor in the saving his house and throne.

Consider: Don’t miss God’s answers to prayers prompted by the Holy Spirit.

**June 7 Evening**

John 4:22-24 *22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."*

Jesus did not give in to the prejudice of His culture, but neither did He deny the error in the Samaritan belief system. Their version of the Laws of Moses was corrupt. They had formed a counterfeit belief system that did not lead to salvation, that is, to the Messiah. The tendency today is to praise the lack of prejudice but condemn Jesus’ judgment of her religious beliefs. Jesus was leading her to truth, not some universal acceptance of all belief systems.

The issue was not about which mountain was the appropriate God pleasing place to worship, but about the heart. The true worshippers are more concerned about the condition of their spirit, not ritual. They are more concerned about truth than cultural acceptance. What good is worship if the heart is fixed on the wrong thing or if the substance of the belief is untrue? The Father is not looking for the correct procedure but for those worshiping in spirit and truth. With that expression, He bridged their cultural differences and found the common ground of a heart after God.

Then He told her a most amazing thing. God is looking for that kind of worshiper. We don’t have to grope around after God. We just need to worship in spirit and truth and He will find us. He is a spirit. He is not some physical object. You don’t need to worship in some special setting, but you do need to worship Him in spirit.

He is truth. There is nothing false in Him. That is why the two requirements for worship are that you worship in spirit and truth. You must be honest about your condition. Nothing is hidden from Him. You can’t present one thing when your heart is trying to hide something contrary. He sees right through us.

Consider: Will He find you, this evening, worshiping in spirit and truth?

**June 8 Morning**

2 Samuel 16:1-2 *1 When David had gone a short distance beyond the summit, there was Ziba, the steward of Mephibosheth, waiting to meet him. He had a string of donkeys saddled and loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred cakes of raisins, a hundred cakes of figs and a skin of wine. 2 The king asked Ziba, "Why have you brought these?" Ziba answered, "The donkeys are for the king's household to ride on, the bread and fruit are for the men to eat, and the wine is to refresh those who become exhausted in the desert."*

Remember Ziba? He was Saul’s servant. David appointed him and his family to be servants of Jonathan’s son, Mephibosheth. After all the kindness and mercy that David showed Mephibosheth, he turned on him, hoping to be inherit Saul’s throne. Ziba was loyal to David. David’s young children and wives needed animals to ride so that they could keep up. Ziba provided them and food to nourish them all on the journey. What David could not prepare in the short notice and sudden flight, God provided from an unlikely source. We can know that when we are in the middle of calamity, God will provide.

It seemed unjust that Ziba and family had been freed when Saul died and then turned back into the servants of Saul’s family. Nevertheless, they humbly submitted. Now they are free again. All Israel was choosing sides. Will you side with the usurper or with the true King? The usurper promises position and power, but he cannot deliver. You will find true freedom with hardship if you follow the true King. Your service will be rewarded for he is just and genuinely appreciative.

Consider: Every day we are tempted to side with the enemy. He promises what he can never deliver. Follow the true King, even when it is difficult.

**June 8 Evening**

John 4:34-36 *34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.*

When Jesus stopped at Jacob’s well, the disciples went to buy food. When they returned Jesus was sharing with the Samaritan woman. The woman went to tell her testimony to the town’s people, and they came out to hear Jesus for themselves. Many of them believed that Jesus was the Savior of the world. This is the first time during Jesus’ ministry that people realized that the Messiah had not come for the Jews alone.

The disciples tried to get Jesus to eat the food they had purchased, but Jesus told them that He had food that they did not know about. They wondered if someone else had brought Him something. Here again we have the physical misinterpretation applied to the spiritual. Jesus saw the world in analogies, and His Spirit filled disciples will one day see the world in that light also.

Then Jesus explained to them that His food was doing the will of God and completing the work He was assigned. He was so absorbed in sharing the light of the Gospel with these receptive people that food was the last thing on His mind. This spiritual work was a much greater priority than eating. He illustrated the need by having the disciples see the people that had come to hear Him as a crop of ripe grain. From planting to harvest is usually four months, but Jesus is saying the planting and the harvest of souls had come together. This woman shared her testimony, and that was the planting. Now the people have come to believe in Jesus, and that is the harvest. Jesus is saying, “Look, we must be busy earning heavenly wages for work in the ripe field. We can harvest in joy and share our joy with the one that planted. How can you think about food at a time like this? This work is a more satisfying food.” Look around you. The fields are ready for harvest. Are you too absorbed dealing with your daily bread?

Remember: When the opportunity is before you, leave everything else and work the field.

**June 9 Morning**

2 Samuel 19:21-22 *21 Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said, "Shouldn't Shimei be put to death for this? He cursed the Lord's anointed."22 David replied, "What do you and I have in common, you sons of Zeruiah? This day you have become my adversaries! Should anyone be put to death in Israel today? Do I not know that today I am king over Israel?"*

When David fled Jerusalem, Shimei, who was from Saul’s clan, threw stones at David and his men and cursed them. He declared that God had given the kingdom to David’s son because of all the blood David had shed in the house of Saul. David was careful to shed no blood of the clan of Saul and executed those who did. One of David’s guards wanted to kill Shimei. In humility, David said that perhaps the Lord had inspired the man to curse him.

Upon return to Jerusalem Shimei came to ask for forgiveness. Abishai, one of David’s commanders, wanted him executed. David continued to have mercy on Shimei. He said he had the throne returned to him and that was enough. He also said he had nothing in common with Abishai. I believe that means he was of a different attitude and spirit. He was not vengeful and bitter, but merciful and forgiving as the Lord had been to him.

If we walk in the Lord, we will sometimes see our enemies ask for forgiveness. We will have opportunity to repay them with evil, but the Spirit of the Lord is to overcome evil with good. If we give in to that spirit of retribution, the enemy of our soul has won. That was the spirit behind the attacks in the first place. If the enemy of our soul can’t get us when we are down, he’ll try when we are on top.

Consider: Don’t give in to a vengeful spirit. Be merciful and forgiving as the Lord has been to you.

**June 9 Evening**

John 4:48-50 *48 "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." 49 The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies." 50 Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed.*

Some folks are desperate for signs and wonders. “Show me and I’ll believe,” they say. A miraculous sign may help convince the seeking but cautious heart, but it will add to the condemnation of the hardhearted who are looking for excuses. Jesus said, *“They have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father”* (John 15:24). Many will believe and yet not confess, because they love their lives just as they are (John 12:42-43).

The royal official may have had some doubts, but he was desperate for Jesus to save his child. He did not let the rebuke deter him. There was nowhere else in which he placed any hope. Jesus spoke the word, and it was done. Remember that whatever your situation, Jesus need only speak the word and it is done. If He does not speak it, there is a reason. The solution to every problem is a word from the lips of Jesus, but He will not speak it when He has better things in store for you.

The man took Jesus at His word. What a great expression! What an example for us today! Like the Centurion whose servant was sick, this official knew a word from the lips of Jesus was enough. And yet, when he arrived at home and found his child well, he asked what hour his healing took place. When he found it was the moment Jesus spoke, he and his entire household believed. The miracle convinced his seeking heart. Are you taking Jesus at His word, both His written and spoken word? When He speaks to your heart, do you count it done? And when you see the miracle, are you and your household convinced?

Consider: The words that He speaks to us are Spirit and life (John 6:63). Hear Him.

**June 10 Morning**

2 Samuel 21:1 *1 During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the LORD. The LORD said, "It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death."*

When the weather conditions were severe so that they suffered a lack of food, David sought the face of the LORD. He did not think it was just cycles. He did not consider it coincidence or natural phenomenon. He looked to God for the reason behind this “natural” problem. When we seek, we will find.

God spoke to David. We do not know how. It may have been audible, or it may have been in his heart. It could have been through one of the prophets. The answer was that the land was experiencing the judgment of God for something that had happened years earlier. Saul had violated the ancient covenant that Joshua made with the Gibeonites. Pretending they had come from a far off country, they had tricked Israel into a peace treaty. Nevertheless, the covenant was made. Saul made war on them, breaking this ancient treaty.

There are times in life when we face the consequences of another’s actions. It is not always clear why there are problems, but it could be God balancing the books. If we seek the face of the LORD, He may show us some way to rectify the imbalance so that God can justly bless the land again with rain. Often it will be something in our own life. It may be an apology that needs to be made, or forgiveness that needs to be granted.

Consider: Trials may come from our own failures or others’ failures, but there is always a lesson to be learned if we will seek the face of the LORD.

**June 10 Evening**

John 5:17-19 *17 Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." 18 For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. 19 Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.*

There are two main lines of thought in regard to rest and work. Some believe that God’s seventh day of rest is ongoing to the present. They believe God does not actively intervene in the world today but allows the natural laws He established to guide all things. A careful look at Scripture, even the Old Testament alone, shows that this is not true. He sets up kings and removes kings. He comforts the downcast and all who turn to Him. He answers the call of all who cry out to Him, and takes the wicked down a dark path.

Jesus declared the Father is always at work and that He was too. In the original language and setting, this was a clear declaration of His equality with God. He had broken their manmade interpretations of God’s law, and He called God His Father. Those who say that Jesus never claimed to be God have not studied the reaction of the religious establishment in Jesus’ day.

Then Jesus, our example in all things, made a very amazing claim. He said He did nothing by Himself. Incredible! He only did what He saw the Father doing. He listened and watched to see where His Father was at work and did what His Father was doing. That would make His actions entirely faultless. If Jesus had the need to live in this manner, how much more do we, who are not God, need to act only when we see the Father at work? The passage goes on to say that the Father loves the Son and shows Him all that He does. Does the Father not love you? If we will watch with discerning eyes, with recognition of how much we need His guidance, will He not also show us what He is doing and invite our participation?

Remember: Watch for God at work in your world.

**June 11 Morning**

2 Samuel 22:2-4 *2 He said: "The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;3 my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior-- from violent men you save me.4 I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.*

After David was delivered from the hand of Saul and all the enemies of Israel, he sang this song. He gave all the credit to God for his victories. He recognized that it was all the grace and presence of the LORD in his life. He sang of all that the Lord meant to him. Have you ever looked back over all that you have been through and given God praise for His goodness? If you do, you will probably find many of the same things David saw. You might not express it the same, but you will find the same wonderful working in your life. A rock, hasn’t God been the one unshakable thing amidst all the changes in your life? A fortress, hasn’t He been the one place you could run for safety in the storms of life? My Deliverer, not only has He delivered each of us from some impossible situations, but most of all from the chains of sin. The strength of my salvation, Your salvation is secure, because it was earned by the Mighty One who paid the price owed in full. A stronghold, a refuge, the One to Whom we run whenever we are overwhelmed or lacking in strength. My Savior! He is our superman and much more. He saved us from an evil worse than any super-villain and has wonderful plans for us. Yes! He is worthy of praise. He has saved you. He is saving you. He will save you. What a mighty God we serve.

Meditate on all that God has been toward you. Sing praise to Him in your own words.

**June 11 Evening**

John 5:41-42, 44 *41 "I do not accept praise from men, 42 but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.*

*44 How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?*

The applause of men, the approval of an audience, is a seductive and fickle illusion. Jesus refused to accept it. Surely He heard it thousands of times, but He refused to let it enter His heart. How hungry man can be for man’s approval! The old nature craves it. Actors and musicians become so addicted to it that they go into depression and drug abuse when their hour of fame ends.

Jesus often painted things in black and white. He said, “You can’t love God and money.” It seems here that He is saying, “You can’t live for the praise of men and the praise of God. You must choose one or the other.” There are rare times when the praise of man coincides with the praise of God, but the reason for that praise is often different. If the love of God was in the hearts of those who gave the praise, their praise may echo God. In the passage above, Jesus knew that was not the case.

Jesus then told them that if they accepted praise from one another, but made no effort to obtain the praise that comes from God only, they could not believe. It was not possible then or now. The praise that comes from God alone is for the secret acts that no one else sees. Those acts are an unseen demonstration of what is really in the heart. The anonymous giver, the secret fast, the time alone in prayer, the meal with the homeless man, no one but God sees or hears about. Why would someone do such things? They seek the praise that comes from God alone. Their genuine faith has expressed itself in love.

This is a test of the authenticity of your faith. Do you seek the praise that comes from God alone, or do make sure that others find out about your “devotion”? Authentic faith sees the praise of man as worthless and lives for the praise that comes from God alone.

Remember: This instruction is not about works on can do to earn merit, but about the life of faith expressing love for the Father.

**June 12 Morning**

1 Kings 3:5,9 *5 At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."**9 So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"*

Solomon began his reign with a heart after God. After offering a thousand sacrifices upon the high place of Gibeon, the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream promising him whatever he would ask.

Of all the things Solomon could have desired, he asked for a discerning heart, wisdom to rule God’s people. He recognized his need for discernment. This pleased the heart of God. He was then told that he would also receive the things for which man would normally ask, riches, long life, and the death of his enemies.

*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you*. Isn’t seeking the kingdom seeking the good of the people in it? Solomon was thinking of others and not himself. It is sad that his heart did not remain in this condition, but at the time it was genuine.

We have here both the good example of seeking the best for the people of God, and the warning to be careful that we do not turn our attention to pleasing ourselves. If you will seek the good of others, God will see that you are taken care of, and you will be laying up treasures in heaven.

Consider what you would ask of God.

**June 12 Evening**

John 6:27-29 *27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." 28 Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" 29 Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."*

In the story of Jesus with the woman at the well, Jesus told His disciples that He had food to eat that they knew nothing about. Now He is telling them that He has food to give that endures to eternal life. Most of us work to put perishable food on the table. The problem comes when you labor FOR the food instead of the reason of faithfulness to the LORD. Working for food is short-sighted and on the level of animal life. God has given man a much higher calling in Christ Jesus.

The crowd, ever obsessed with finding the quintessential rule, asked, *"What must we do to do the works God requires?"* God had given hundreds of laws through Moses. The prophets seem to have focused the essence down to a few key laws. Now they wanted one work that would get them into heaven. Jesus had the answer, only it was not a work they could perform, but the work of another. *"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."* Do you want to receive the food that endures to eternal life? Do you want the water that is an eternal fountain? Do you want satisfaction in that void in your heart both now and forever? Believe in the one God has sent.

When you believe that He is the One that the Father has provided to make you right with Him, then you will go to Him for the eternal food. Though you consume His wonderful words, they can be eaten again and again. The wonder is that instead of getting used to them, they get sweeter each time. What are you living FOR? I hope you have not given up and settled for the things of creation that are passing. They satisfy less and less with each successive consumption.

Remember: Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before.

**June 13 Morning**

1 Kings 6:7 *7 In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built.*

Imagine the precision that had to be used to have the stones perfectly fit when they arrived at the temple site! Three-dimensional exactness had to be obtained at the quarry, for no pounding of any iron tool was to be heard at the site. Each block was custom made for an exact location to fit with the blocks beside and below.

Peter refers to believers as living stones (1 Peter 2:4-5). What kind of parallel can we see here? Jesus is the real builder of the temple of God, as the author of Hebrews declared (Hebrews 3:3-4). He must shape us to perfectly fit the place God has for us and that includes fitting in with those around us. Each of us has a calling and a place in the temple. But what does this noiseless activity represent?

The pounding and shaping, the noisy activity, should go on outside the temple site. When we gather to worship is not the time to hash out our differences. There we quietly behold His glory or sing His praises. There, our focus is not on our fit with the stone next to us but the wonder of our Savior. O come let us adore Him. Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

The hammering and shaping should go on in the quarry. One on one with the Lord, we should allow ourselves to be shaped. The places we do not fit with the other living stones must be chiseled away. That noisy and often painful activity goes on in the quarry with Jesus so that we do not disturb the focus of others as we gather to worship corporately. Are you letting Him remove from you the protrusions in your life that keep you from fitting perfectly with the rest of the building?

Take time alone with God to let Him make some reductions in you so that you fit with the other stones.

**June 13 Evening**

John 6:53, 63, 68 *53 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 63 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.*

*68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*

After the miraculous feeding of the 5000, the people wanted Jesus to regularly provide food for them like the manna in the wilderness. Jesus told them that there was something much greater worth seeking. He encouraged them to look for food that lasts forever. Then He explained that it came through His body and blood. This was a thought so difficult for them to grasp that many turned away convinced that He was not the One. After all, the law that God gave forbade such a thing. But as we see so frequently in John, the people are taking a spiritual expression to literal extremes.

John explained to us, in the first verses of this gospel, that Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:14). Some have taken these words just as the Jews of Jesus day and said that the bread of communion is transformed into the flesh of Jesus and the wine becomes His blood. We must read on to verse 63 to see that Jesus is clearly referring to His Word and His Spirit. Notice the word “life” in these verses. Verse 53 says that life comes through His flesh and blood. Verse 63 explains that life is from the Word and the Spirit. We see the same thing in John 4. Worshipers must worship in Spirit and truth.

This ended the popular period of Jesus’ ministry. The crowds would not be back until Jesus went south in the last month of His earthly life. Why did Jesus make it so hard? People were coming to Him for the wrong reason. They wanted food and health, not the Spirit and truth. But there were a few who were desperate for the words of life. When Jesus asked if even His closest would leave too, Peter answered, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”*

Consider: Why do you follow? Are you desperate for Spirit and truth? Do you see that as life itself?

**June 14 Morning**

1 Kings 8:10-11 *10 When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD.11 And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple*.

When Solomon had finished building the temple that David had planned, the priests stepped out of the Holy Place (an inner room of the temple). Then a cloud filled the temple of the LORD. The Hebrews associated clouds with the glory of God. Their ancestors had seen the cloud on Sinai when Moses met with God. The glory of the LORD so filled the temple that the priests could not come in and do their assigned duties.

Our bodies are the temples of the LORD. Jesus said, “Destroy this temple (meaning his body) and in three days I will raise it up.” His body was so full of the glory of God that He did nothing except what the Father showed Him. Jesus didn’t really have His own ministry isolated and of itself. He was a yielded instrument to the glory of His Father. He always yielded Himself to the Father, and so *“we have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* John 1:14 The glory of the Father was His operating source.

We are often carried away with our ministry, and wrapped up in what must be done. If we are not careful and focused we will end up ministering from the wrong source. The glory needs to fill our temple, our earthly body. Then there is no room for us to get in the way and make a mess of things. The glory needs to fill us so that He is the source of our activity and we are merely submitted vessels for that glory.

Consider: What is the source of your activity? Is your temple filled with the glory of God?

**June 14 Evening**

John 7:16-18 *16 Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. 17 If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. 18 He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.*

The Jewish leaders were amazed that Jesus could speak with such depth and yet he did not study with any of the great rabbis of that day. Man puts so much emphasis on his own educational system with each generation thinking theirs is the correct and complete one. Jesus doesn’t point to His miraculous birth, or His hours of study, or even His eternal existence. He says what we need to hear. Our teaching should not be our own. It should come from the One who sent us. Are we hearing His voice? Is the Word alive to us by the power of the Holy Spirit?

How do you change from the perspective of men and their pride in their brain cells to a person whose ear is opened to the Spirit of God? Choose to do God’s will. Choose to glorify God and not self. If you choose to do God’s will, you must first lay aside your own goals of self-importance, the right to autonomy. That is taking up your cross. When the will is then submitted to your Creator, His voice can come through. You are no longer seeking your glory, but the glory of the One that sends you. In doing His will, you realize that His ways are the fruitful and productive ones even though the world may not understand. Your eyes become opened to a design that goes deeper than the visible.

This is the difference between a speaker and a preacher. The speaker may stir your emotions, but a genuine preacher of the Gospel will bring glory to God and not self. You will leave thinking the speaker is a wonderful person, but you leave the preacher’s message thinking about the glory of God.

Remember: Born again souls will find that the Holy Spirit will put His finger over their lips when they slip into expressions that exalt self.

**June 15 Morning**

1 Kings 8:59-61 ***59****And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day's need,****60*** *so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other.****61*** *But your hearts must be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time."*

Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple is worth taking time to study.

The end of that prayer is our Scripture today. He asks that this prayer be continually before the LORD and to uphold their cause. The reason he is bold enough to ask this is verse 60, *so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other.* This was God’s heart. If Israel would truly live in relationship with God, then the world would receive the witness of God’s faithfulness and love. The world would know there is no other god. That was God’s intention in forming Israel as a nation, to witness to the world the blessing of obedience and worship of the one true God.

BUT, there is always a condition. That is because we are creatures with a free will. BUT, *your hearts must be fully committed to the LORD our God.* It is the same today. You are the only bible that many will read. God will hear your prayer and uphold your cause, BUT your heart must be fully committed to Him. If people look to you as a person in relationship with God but your walk does not match your talk, they will be misled. But if you are fully committed, even with your mistakes, they will see an example. The eyes of Israel had been on David when he fell, but because his heart was fully committed, they saw an example of conviction and repentance. They saw a humbled man.

Consider: Is there room for any other loyalty in your heart, or are you FULLY committed? If at this time you are fully committed, see that you stay that way. Then you can know that the LORD will hear your prayer and uphold your cause.

**June 15 Evening**

John 7:37-39 *37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." 39 By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*

The Feast of Tabernacles was the most popular feast of the Jews. They built makeshift shelters all around Jerusalem in which they lived during that week. Each day the High Priest would go to the pool of Siloam and bring back a pitcher of water to the altar. The people sang the Hallel Psalms accompanied by the Levitical choir and flutes. They marched around the altar holding palm branches extended over it. At certain points in the psalms, they stopped to wave the branches and give shouts of praise. The priest poured out the water as a drink offering, reminding them of God’s provision of water in the wilderness. It was also a prayer for rain for their crops. On the last day of the feast, they marched around the altar seven times, a reminder of the march around Jericho.

It was probably after this dramatic conclusion of the ceremony, as the shouts of praise died down, that Jesus’ voice rang out. *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."* It must have stopped everyone in their tracks. Jesus was saying that the physical water was good thing to be thankful for, but He was bringing the spiritual water for thirsty souls. After His ascension He would be pouring out living water, the Holy Spirit, to all who would come to Him.

The Spirit of God indwelling us is the great ideological difference from all other religious ideas. Some religions had blood atonement. Some had a Savior whose words were supposedly a revelation from God. Christianity is unique in that this God claimed to indwell them with His presence. The great thirst in the heart of man is only slaked by this indwelling presence of the Living God.

Consider: Has your thirst been quenched with His presence?

**June 16 Morning**

1 Kings 10:8-9 *8 How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! 9 Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the Lord's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness."*

The Queen of Sheba had heard of the wisdom of Solomon and his relation to the name of the LORD. We often overlook her interest in Solomon’s relationship to the name of the LORD. The LORD’s name is the sum of all His attributes. The LORD is all-wise, but He is also faithful, merciful, loving, just, true, holy, etc. She came to see it all in Solomon. All men are a poor reflection, but Solomon was one of the best in the world at that time.

After spending time asking questions, hearing his answers and seeing the wealth and splendor of his royal court, she burst into the praise of verse 9. Once again, we have an expression of just why it is the LORD bestows His favor. Why did God place Solomon over Israel? It was because of His eternal love for them.

Has anyone ever come to visit with you because of your relation to the name of the LORD? They may have without you being aware of the real reason for their visit. If we are truly walking with the LORD, in His Spirit, the seekers will be overwhelmed too. It is not you they are overwhelmed about, but the LORD whose life is expressed through yours.

Why has God placed you where you are and have you doing what you do? It is because He loves the people around you and desires for you to be an example of Him in that environment.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Help me express Your wonderful character in my daily life that others might come to know You.

**June 16 Evening**

John 8:3-4, 7 *3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.*

*7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."*

Verses 1-11 of John chapter 9 are not found in some of the earliest manuscripts, but it is included in one and a space was left for it in two others. Augustine suggests that it was left out of some because “they were of slight faith” and “to avoid a scandal”. If we look at the text carefully, we find it was the Pharisees who were scandalous. They seem to be trying to trap Jesus in His loving attitude toward sinners. Jealous of the crowds Jesus drew, they were seeking for some way to show that He did not adhere to the Law that God had given through Moses. In doing so they broke the Law. The Law demanded both the man and the woman be dealt with. Where was the man? If they caught her in the act, they must have caught the man also. Was he in on their scheme?

When they questioned Jesus, He bent over and began to write on the ground. The Greek word used for “write” is better translated “to write against.” Perhaps He was writing down the sins they had committed and were in need of mercy. When He was pushed to act, He suggested that the one who was without sin cast the first stone. If you are going to start judging others, make sure you are right with God and not in need of mercy yourself. Stones dropped to the ground as they left, one by one, from the oldest to the youngest.

It was not that Jesus had compromised the Law, in fact, He made it even stricter by saying that even looking on a woman with lust was an act of adultery. Then He told the woman He did not accuse her either. He was the only one there that could have thrown a stone at her or at us. Instead He offered her hope. *“Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.”* When forgiveness is offered, there is also the expectation of a change in lifestyle. This is not a story of compromise but of the grace and mercy we all are in need of, with the expectation of a transformed life.

Consider: We are all sinners saved by grace. That should affect the way we treat others caught in sin.

**June 17 Morning**

1 Kings 11:4 *4 As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been.*

Solomon started with a heart after God. He had learned from his father, David, that God was worthy of all our praise. The blessing of God was upon Solomon, and he was probably the wisest and wealthiest king to ever live. But in prosperity, there is great danger. He had a weakness for women. He married women from the countries that the Lord had forbidden the Israelites to marry. God had warned in the Law that if there should be a king over Israel, he was not to multiply to himself many wives (Deuteronomy 17:17). God warned that wives of other nations would turn his heart from the true God.

There are a number of warnings for us in this sad account of the demise of Solomon. The first is to pay attention to the word of God. We may think our abilities or gifts make us exempt from some command of God. We may justify our sin in any number of ways, but we will suffer for disobedience. The warnings in the Word are for our own good.

Choose your mate carefully. Your mate will, overtime, affect your relationship with God. You may think you can win them, or that you will not be affected, but two do become one. There has to be influence. If you are already in a marriage with an unbeliever, pray! Pray for strength to stand firm in your faith. Pray for opportunities to help turn your mates’ heart. Look for the leading of the Holy Spirit to share God’s love for them.

We see in this passage that God is after a fully devoted heart, not a heart of compromise. In our old age, when we are slowing down from everything, we are tempted to slow down on our wholehearted devotion. Don’t go there! Finish strong. Endure to the end. Have a heart like David!

Admonition: Don’t let anything or anyone dilute your testimony.

**June 17 Evening**

John 8:31-32, 36 *31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

*36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*.

In this discussion with the Jews, Jesus said that every word He spoke came from God. He claimed that when He was crucified they would believe. He also claimed that His every action was from God. His claims were so extraordinary, yet His life backed His claims. Some of those present believed Him. To those who believed He spoke the words of our text today. If you are a believer today, these words are also to you.

If you hold to Jesus’ teaching, you are really His disciple. We put a lot of emphasis on the decision to believe. Discipleship requires a continuing process of holding to the words that Jesus spoke. A believer can go on in bondage to sin because they have not chosen to go on in discipleship. Clinging to Christ’s life transforming words that came from the Father breaks the bondage of sin. Until we go on into discipleship we will be a poor example of the life of Christ.

As we live in the word of God, it will change the way we think. Changing our thoughts changes our desires. Changed desires cause us to act differently. The freedom that comes from holding to Jesus’ teaching is something the world cannot understand. They think they are free to sin when sin is enslaving them. Your freedom to turn down temporal pleasure looks like bondage to them. Only in the deepest stages of their bondage can they see they are enslaved. Demonstrating your freedom with joy and love can help them see the difference.

Consider: Are you a mere believer still in bondage, or are you going on into discipleship and the freedom that only the Son can give?

**June 18 Morning**

1 Kings 12:7-8 ***7*** *They replied, "If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants."8 But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him.*

Solomon reigned for forty years, the same number of years as his father David. Because his heart turned to other gods, the LORD promised ten tribes to one of his overseers, Jeroboam. When Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, was to be crowned king, the people asked him to please lighten the burden Solomon had placed on them. Solomon had heavily taxed the people and given them assignments in service to the kingdom. Rehoboam asked the people to give him three days to consider their request.

First he went to the elders that had advised his father. They had been a part of the success of his father and had a track record of giving good advice. They had years of experience and were very wise individuals. They advised Rehoboam to be a servant leader. They told him that if he would indeed lighten their load, the people would keep their word and serve him faithfully all their life.

Rehoboam didn’t like that advise. He wanted what his father had. Why should he tighten his belt and do with less? He sought out the advice of the young men he grew up with. They told him what he wanted to hear. He answered the people that he would be harsher than his father. The ten northern tribes drew away with Jeroboam as their leader, fulfilling the word of God.

Man always wants more. It is hard for the carnal nature to give up niceties of life but oh so easy to desire more. In Rehoboam’s greed, he lost nearly all. Instead of a minor cutback he had to make a major one.

Consider: When seeking advice we have a tendency to look to those who will tell us what we want to hear, and we reject the advice of those who tell us what we would rather not hear. Though age does not always bring wisdom, ask advice of those who have the life that shows they are wise. Ask people who demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit. Even if you don’t like their answers, realize they are best for you. Refusing sound advice may cause you to end up with even less than you fear losing.

**June 18 Evening**

John 9:31-33 *31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."*

John chapter 8 ended with Jesus declaring His eternal existence and the Jews trying to stone Him. In chapter 9 we find that He has not fled but remained hidden in the crowds. He healed the eyes of a man who had been born blind. The people brought the healed man to the religious leaders to show them the amazing thing that had been done. Because Jesus made mud to put on the man’s eyes on the Sabbath day, the leaders were convinced He was not a godly man. Then they questioned whether or not the man was actually born blind.

Their tradition taught that the miraculous authenticated the words and mission of the prophet, but their interpretation of the law was that a godly person would not do a healing work on the Sabbath. Instead of examining their convictions, they set out to prove it didn’t really happen or that Jesus was evil. Sometimes we are so stuck in our misconceptions that, even when reality slaps us in the face, we can’t stop and reconsider our convictions.

Instead of rejoicing with the man who could now miraculously see, the leaders continued to cross-examine him. Finally he gave them the answer that is the verse for this evening. “Why can’t you decide if this man is of God or not? God doesn’t answer the requests of sinners but of people who do His will. This miracle had never been seen before! If He wasn’t of God how could He have done such a thing?” Instead of following the man’s simple logic, the leaders insulted him and threw him out (may mean they would no longer allow Him access to the Temple). His words must have struck a very raw nerve.

This was one of the unique signs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. When the Holy Spirit brings conviction to our lives, we must take caution that we do not follow the Pharisees’ pattern of justification, denial, and attack. The man who had been blind found Jesus and believed Him to be the Messiah. He received both physical and spiritual sight, while the leaders stayed in spiritual darkness.

Prayer: Lord, help us to humble ourselves and admit when we are wrong.

**June 19 Morning**

1 Kings 17:2-4 *2 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah:3 "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan.4 You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there."*

Elijah had just predicted that until he prayed for rain there would be no rain on the land. Then God sent Elijah to a hide from the king and provided for him in a rather unusual way. The ravens brought him the ingredients for sandwiches. If you’ve ever watched ravens eat, you know they do not like to share. That’s quite a miracle. God is Lord over His creation.

I once read a story of a Chinese brother who was imprisoned for his faith. The guards withheld his food because he would not renounce Christ, so the LORD ordered mice to bring him food. He probably ate better on what the mice brought than if the prison had served him his meals.

Jesus told us not to worry about what we will eat or wear because we have a Father in heaven that knows we are in need. If He feeds the sparrows he will feed us, for He values us more than the sparrows. The psalmist said, from his youth to his old age, he had never seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread (Psalm 37:25).

If we are obedient to the LORD we will not starve. We may not always have the abundance we might prefer, but God will care for us. Having food and clothing, we should be content. If we can learn to be content with the few necessities of life, the many things that distract us will lose their power of influence over us. We can then give our attention to the LORD and His instruction to us. He didn’t promise us luxury in this life, in fact, he promised tribulation (John 16:33). But we have the assurance that He will care for us as a Father cares for his children.

Meditation: Rest assured, the LORD will care for you.

**June 19 Evening**

John 10:9-11 *9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. 11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

Shepherds in ancient Israel built makeshift pens out of rock and briars. There was only one opening into the pen. As dusk began to settle in, the shepherd would call his sheep into the pen and then lay himself across the entrance. Any predator would make a lot of noise trying to get over the wall into the pen and thus wake the shepherd. Jesus said He is the gate or door to the sheep pen.

There is a predator that would love to tear you from limb to limb, because he hates your Father. He has these objectives irremovably bound in his heart: murder, theft, and destruction. That is why the good Shepherd is the gate to the pen. If that predator gets in, He knows what will become of us, so He puts Himself in harms way. If you go through the good Shepherd into the pen, you are saved from the Destroyer. Jesus will let you out when it is safe and lead you to good pasture. He has a very different objective. Love binds it to His heart. It is to give you life to the full (1 Peter 1:8).

The Destroyer will lie through his teeth to get you away from the Shepherd. He will promise you all kinds of things, but none of it is true. The Shepherd never lies. He loves you so much that He gave His life protecting you. You have read the history of these two. Jesus outlined their very different desires toward you. Which will you believe today? …and in the future? Why even listen to the one who has evil intentions toward you? Instead, listen to the Shepherd’s voice. That is one way of knowing whose sheep you are. The Shepherd’s sheep hear His voice and follow Him. Go in and out through Him today and find pasture.

Meditation: He came to give us life to the full!

**June 20 Morning**

1 Kings 17:14-15 *14 For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'"15 She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family.*

Once the Kerith Ravine dried up, the Lord sent Elijah to the home of a Gentile woman. If you thought ravens were stingy, try humans. But a few verses earlier the LORD said He had commanded her to feed Elijah. Elijah gave her a real faith test by asking her to feed him first and then cook her and her son a meal from the little left in her jar. If the LORD had not commanded her to do this, I doubt she would have even considered it. Even though there was a promise that a miracle would happen, consider that this woman is not Jewish. The prophet before her had been camping out in a ravine for months. Who is going to give their last meal to him instead of feeding their own child? But just as the LORD commanded the ravens, so He commanded her.

When she obeyed, she found the promise was true. One pastor tells of the surprise she must have experienced each time she reached in to scrape the bottom of the jars. Just enough for another meal, again, and again, and again!

We have the same experience when we abide in Christ. We think we have scraped the bottom of the mercy and grace jar with a certain brother. We reach into the life of Christ within us and, low and behold, there is just enough for the present situation. Then another situation comes along. The last time, we know we scraped the bottom and had just barely enough. Here this brother is offending us again. How can we possible find the mercy to forgive him? But we reach into the earthen vessel that holds the treasure and what do you know! It is just enough to meet the present circumstance.

Consider: If you will give love and mercy and grace to those around you first, there will always be enough for you when you have a need. Even when you think you have run out, reach down in there again and you will find it in Christ, the One who lives within you.

**June 20 Evening**

John 11:25-27 *25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."*

Jesus was the close friend of a family in Bethany just two miles outside of Jerusalem. The family consisted of a brother and two sisters. The brother, Lazarus had died. Though the women sent word to Jesus during Lazarus’ illness, Jesus waited until Lazarus had been dead for four days before He came. Traditionally the Jews mourned for a solid week when a loved one died. The first three days were designated as days of weeping. It was after that period had passed that Jesus finally came to them.

The women both had the same comment, which makes one wonder if they had voiced this to each other. *“Lord, if you had been here, our brother would not have died.”* Jesus loved them, and that is why He waited. Without the painful experience, they would never have fully believed Jesus’ next “I AM” revelation. *"I am the resurrection and the life.”*

He had raised the dead daughter of the Jewish ruler, and the son of a widow in Nain, but never someone dead this many days. This would be the next irrefutable sign that He was the Messiah. The Jews believed the spirit of the dead waited around for four days to re-enter the body, but in the heat of Palestine the face would be so decomposed by that time that the spirit would give up. Lazarus walked out of his tomb unmarred by illness, death, or decomposition.

There are times in our lives when we do not understand why Jesus does not show up. He is working toward something greater in our hearts. He would rather see you know Him than to answer your every request. Pain is often the teacher that leads us to a greater revelation of Christ. It is not that Jesus gives life and resurrection, it is that He gives us Himself.

Consider: He is the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this?

**June 21 Morning**

1 Kings 18:17-18 *17 When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?"18 "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals*.

Elijah has been in hiding for three years. Wicked king Ahab searched the nations for him. The drought was so severe that it was destroying the kingdom. When God sent Elijah to meet with the king, the king called him, “the troubler of Israel.” Amazing how the world sees the saint as the evil one. There is a cry in some societies today against “the intolerant Christians.” There will always be a cry against the righteous who stand for integrity and truth. As long as you represent the LORD, and hold Him as the standard, the world will hate you and blame you for the troubles that stem from the judgments of God. Elijah had come to bring the mercy of God in the form of rain.

He set the record straight when he told Ahab that it was he and his family that were the cause of the trouble in Israel. Why? They have abandoned the LORD’S commands and followed Baals. If God allowed rain when the people looked to Baal for it, He would be encouraging them to have faith in a lie. The mercy of God withheld the rain. The guilty often point their finger at the very ones who are trying to bring the grace and mercy of God into a situation.

There are times when a brother will bring us a harsh word. We must determine whether there is validity in it, or if we are being attacked for our integrity. A heart that is soft toward God will soon know the difference. Ahab did not have such a heart. I trust, by the grace of God, you and I do.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me stand for truth and righteousness regardless of what the world may call me. Help me to bring your grace into a needy world.

**June 21 Evening**

John 12:32-33 *32 But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." 33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.*

Jesus was responding to the Greeks who wanted to talk with Him. The ancients had a fable that spoke of a chain that Jupiter could let down to the earth to draw it and all its inhabitants to himself. It may have been to this image in the Greek mind that He spoke of when He indicated the form of His death. It was not in a display of power but of surrender to the Father out of love for mankind that the world would be drawn to Him. Even now, the drawing power of the cross reaches into our hearts and speaks of love that is greater than we dare dream.

The power of the cross, that says God loves me enough to give His only Son, draws us out of our fear and the selfish demands that we cling to. It is in beholding this love that we find birthed in us a love that draws us out of all that would hold us back from becoming the servants of such a loving King.

Jesus knew the death that awaited Him. He saw it in the Scriptures. He heard it from the Father. He warned His disciples so as to lessen the shock that it would have on their faith. How could they understand that this would be the expression of love that would draw all men to Him? The sooner we learn to trust in that love combined with the power of His sovereignty over all things, the sooner we will rest in the peace it offers us. There we are drawn ever closer.

Consider: Are you allowing yourself to be drawn to Him?

**June 22 Morning**

1 Kings 18:21 *21 Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing*.

Elijah had Ahab meet him on Mount Carmel with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. The people of Israel gathered to watch the showdown. After three and a half years without rain, did they still believe Baal brought the blessing of rain? He asked them point blank, but they do not answer him one word. What would it take? What will it take today, as we see the weather plaguing us instead of blessing us? How long will the people of the world look to the god of science? How long will we waver between two opinions? People do not want to believe in God because they intrinsically realize that if He is real He is worthy of our worship. If He is our Creator, then we owe all to Him.

God was wooing Israel back to Himself with a challenge to believe. He had showed the impotence of their supposed gods, just as He had done before when He brought them out of Egypt. What will it take? Though Israel’s false god could not perform for them, they refused to believe in the God that had already performed miracles throughout their history. How many times does God have to miraculously show us that He alone is God? We will look at history and take lessons of the past as valid instruction today in the secular sense. Why not learn from the history of the many ways that God has proven Himself to be the Almighty One?

Consider: If there are trials and circumstances in your life today, they may be the mercy of God to ask you, “How long will you waver between two opinions?”

**June 22 Evening**

John 12:48-50 *48 There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. 49 For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. 50 I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."*

The word of Jesus is the Word of God. That is why the words of Jesus will judge mankind. When we hear those words we are hearing our Maker. Then we must decide if we will accept or reject the truth of those words.

What an incredible example He set for us in that every word was straight from the Father in the way that the Father would have Him say it. His reputation then was tied to that of the Father. To condemn His words was to condemn the Father. To reject Him was to reject the Father. As you read the Word, remember that every word from Christ is straight from the Father, and you must decide whether you will receive or reject each one.

The more we walk in the Light, the less there is of us to dislike or like. Our reputation and testimony is increasingly tied to that of the Father. Jesus wasn’t personally offended when people rejected His words, because they were the Father’s words. As we decrease, and He increases in us, we will find there is no need to defend our reputation. If we will follow His example of saying the Father’s words the way the Father shows us, we can have the same freedom to accept rejection.

Does rejection from people trouble you? Increasingly seek to speak the words of the Father that the Holy Spirit brings to your mind the way He would have you say them, and you can find freedom from that fear.

Consider: It takes time at Jesus’ feet to hear what He would have us say and how to say it.

**June 23 Morning**

1 Kings 18:36-37 *36 At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command.37 Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."*

Elijah had given the prophets of Baal every advantage. He gave them most of the day. They had hundreds of Baal priests. When they had exhausted all their efforts he built an altar of twelve stones, arranged the wood, and placed the sacrificial bull. He dug a trough around the altar. Then he had the people drench the altar with water until the trough filled up.

It must have been 3PM, the time of the evening sacrifice. Elijah prayed the above prayer. He declared the reason for this test was that the people would know there is a God in Israel, and that he was doing these things at God’s command. He prayed that so that the people would know that the LORD (Jehovah, also YHWH) is God. He prayed that they would realize God was turning their hearts back.

A fire fell from heaven and consumed everything, including the altar stones! Then the people shouted, “Elijah, Elijah, Elijah!” Elijah’s name means God is

Jehovah! They were declaring that God is Jehovah. Elijah’s prayer was answered.

If we operate at God’s command and pray with a heart to see people realize that the LORD is God, we can expect to see miracles also. We can expect God to turn hearts back to Him. If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

Pray the above prayer for your family and nation.

**June 23 Evening**

John 13:13-15 *13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.*

John’s gospel is the only one that relays this important lesson. You can imagine the disciples wondering who was going to get the thrones to the right and left of Jesus in the Kingdom. Certainly they were not going to stoop to do the lowly job assigned to the lowest of servants. They may have been thinking that there was no servant there to wash their feet, but one day soon, they would be served continually. Luke tells us they were actually arguing during the Passover supper about who would hold the top positions. It is amazing how we can hear only what we want to hear.

Jesus’ words were not received, so He gave them an illustration that was certain to stick with them every day of their lives. He took a towel and basin and did the job of the lowliest of servants. Most teachers were waited on by their disciples. Some groups would even purchase servants. In Jesus’ band, the servant was the Master. He always had been though they did not recognize it. That was unthinkable, unheard of, and almost impossible to accept. Peter balked at having Jesus perform such a menial task.

After the picture was clearly painted for them, He told them that they were to do as He had done. This was so contrary to the thinking of the world that it must have taken a long time to sink in. Has it sunk into your concept of reality? We never read of the Apostles fighting for power and position again. Maybe that is why the spokesman in Jerusalem during those early days of the church was not one of them. It took a century for the church to start making a hierarchy. If you are a leader or desire to be one, do you think of it as being the lowliest of servants? This was one of the factors in the rise of Christianity during that first century. How could Rome capture the leaders when it could not recognize them? Who would pick the servant as the leader except those whose thought- life had been transformed by the Spirit of God.

Consider: Like Jesus, mature spiritual leaders do not come to be served but to serve. Do all you can to help them in their service.

**June 24 Morning**

1 Kings 19:2-4 *2 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there,4 while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."*

When Ahab relayed the message of Elijah’s victory on Mt. Carmel to Jezebel, she promised to do to Elijah what he had done to the prophets of Baal. In doing so, she made an oath common at the time. She vowed that if she couldn’t do it to him, then the gods could do it to her. God took her up on that. We need to watch carefully the vows that come from our lips. God hears them.

It is hard to imagine her heart being so hard that, even after hearing of a mighty miracle of God, she would attempt to murder the instrument of that miracle. Elijah took her threat seriously. He faced the false prophets, but he was afraid to face Jezebel and her army. Going off into the desert, he found a bit of shade to rest under and asked God to take him home. He must have thought that after the great victory, things would suddenly change. The people knew Jehovah was God, so why didn’t they overthrow Ahab and Jezebel? Elijah was burned out. He had fought for his life and the cause of the LORD and came to the climactic point, yet nothing seemed to have changed. Even great men of God despair of life. In God’s time there will be a change in the nation. Elijah had to train a disciple before he could go to his heavenly home. Despair comes upon us at times, but don’t give up. There are things yet to be done. (To be continued.)

Remember: When you are discouraged and downhearted, know that God is sovereign over all. Circumstances will change in His perfect time.

**June 24 Evening**

John 13:34-35 *34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

Jesus had just given His disciples a great illustration on serving each other. He told them that they were to serve each other as He had served them. How can you really serve a person from the heart if you do not love them from the heart? The competition that the world engenders is based on self-love. It was what they were expressing when they fought about who would be first in the coming Kingdom. In that expression, they were no different from the world. How can anyone see the good news we have to bring when they see our lives are no different from theirs?

In the Old Testament, we have the instruction to love our neighbor as ourselves. How is this then a new command? First, it is not restricted to my neighbor. Jesus expounded on that in Luke 10. Second, the manner in which we are to love is that of Jesus’ love for us. It is not optional in either Testament. It is a command. To refuse to do so is to refuse to obey God.

This one characteristic is to distinguish us from the world. Think about it. How many people do you know that express a love toward you strong enough to give their life? That is certainly a rare thing in this world. The contrast is the world’s selfishness and self-seeking. If you were to see the type of love Jesus has for us in a person, you would certainly notice that he or she had something very different. This is the chief form of evangelism that Jesus had in mind. It is easy to find any number of other forms of evangelism that cost much less, but will they know we are truly disciples if we do not pay the price of genuine love? Any other form of evangelism must be accompanied with Jesus’ love to have the recognition that it is from above.

Prayer: Lord, help me to love with Your love.

**June 25 Morning**

1 Kings 19:7-8 *7 The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you."8 So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.*

Poor Elijah! He had been on the run and in hiding for three and a half years. He brought a great victory for God and was forced back into hiding again. God sent an angel to deliver the food and water he needed. Elijah was so tired from the spiritual conflict that he needed an angelic alarm clock. He was encouraged to eat to get the strength he needed for the journey.

There is a temptation for those suffering from depression to forget the physical. Elijah needed to eat to get the strength to move to a new setting. We can use a change of scenery. It gets our mind off the problems that have overwhelmed us. Then we are able to hear from God without the cloud of things troubling us and distorting what He speaks to our hearts.

He traveled to the same place Moses got his inspiration, Horeb. Horeb means

“fresh inspiration.” That was what Moses needed too. Moses went from second in Egypt to being a shepherd and had given up the hope of helping his people. When we get to the place of despair that Elijah and Moses were in, we need to get away to a mountain of inspiration. We need to meet with God and hear from Him. We need

God’s perspective on our situation. (To be continued.)

Consider: Where do you need to go for some fresh inspiration?

**June 25 Evening**

John 14:1-3 *1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*

Jesus had just told the disciples He was leaving. He told Peter that he would deny Him, and then He followed those words with the passage for this evening. *“Do not let…”* is telling them that they can choose to not allow their hearts to enter into turmoil. Few Christians today believe this! Jesus was telling them that in the worse imaginable scenario, they could choose to not allow their hearts to be disquieted. They could remain calm and firm in their convictions in the face of their Master being tortured to death. How in the world is that possible?

He told them how, *“Trust in God; trust also in me.”* Trust, or believe, in both God the Father’s sovereignty over all, and Jesus’ choice to go the direction He was led by His Father. The sovereignty of God, His will being the final outcome after all is done and said, is a great source of peace to the people of God. No matter what you face, if you know the God who loves you will have His way in the end, you can peacefully endure all things. It is when we place our trust in our self that we should be disturbed! Where is your trust placed in your situation today?

In Jesus’ day, a suitor would ask his prospective bride to wait for him while he added a room onto his father’s house. Once the room was completed, he would return with his friends for a weeklong wedding party. Then they would return to the new room to live together. He would tell her something very similar to verses 2 and 3 above. Jesus is not leading you on. He can’t lie. He is preparing a place for you. He will be back to receive you to Himself so that you can forever be with Him. It should cause us amazement to consider that He so desires us to be with Him. Don’t let your heart doubt or be in fear. The One who cannot lie has promised a wonderful new beginning, eternally in His presence, in a special relationship with Him.

Remember: Trust! Believe! Do not let your heart be troubled.

**June 26 Morning**

1 Kings 19:11-12 *11 The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.*

Elijah had come to the mountain of God, the place of fresh inspiration. He saw the wind so strong it broke the rocks. The ground shook with an earthquake. A fire followed the earthquake. But God had not passed by him in any of those things.

Those things preceded God. God came in the gentle whisper.

What was this discouraged prophet learning from God’s lesson to Him? Perhaps he thought the fire from heaven would transform the hearts of the people causing a national revolt and return to God. The rain had been a physical sign that God was working through Elijah. Surely they would all listen then. But all those physical things only preceded the real work of God, His whisper in each and every heart.

That is where the real change comes.

Man is always seeking some great physical sign or manifestation. We want to see, hear, and feel something that will move our senses. God may precede a work in that manner. If people are too immature or off track, it may be necessary. But what follows is really where God is. He is in the voice that speaks to the heart and brings a change of attitude to the heart. That is where individuals and nations are changed. God is about to whisper a word to Elijah that will change the course of nations.

Consider: Are you looking for the spectacular and forgetting the power of the whisper? Listen! Be still and know He is God (Psalm 46:10). Realize the power of His whisper to change your life and that of those you come in contact with each day. He may even whisper through you.

**June 26 Evening**

John 14:12-14 *12 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*

In the verses that preceded the text for this evening, Jesus had just told the disciples that He was in the Father and the Father in Him. The words that He spoke were not His but the Father’s. If we take the above verses out of context, it sounds like Jesus is our magic genie. That is not what He is saying.

If you have faith in Jesus, that is to believe and receive Him, or to have the relationship He has with the Father, you will do what He has been doing. The miracles and words of Jesus came from His relationship with the Father. If you have the kind of relationship with Jesus that He lived out on this earth with His Father, then your life will look like His. The New Testament writers understood this clearly. Jesus’ goal is to conform us to His perfect example. That is the expression of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

If we have that oneness with Jesus that He exemplified with the Father, then you can “ask in His name.” That means you can request with the authority of an official representative of Jesus. It does not mean to add the magic phrase “in Jesus’ name.” The request will be the will of Jesus just as Jesus’ requests were always the will of the Father.

This promise carries no limits, but it is not without the previously implied conditions. If those conditions did not exist, every immature Christian would have won the local lottery and be a super-star to their spiritual detriment. That would move you away from God’s goal, Christ’s likeness. But if that oneness with Jesus does exist, consider your potential to touch the world around you with the very words and miracles of Jesus!

Consider: What should I be asking of God in the authority of Jesus’ name?

**June 27 Morning**

1 Kings 19:13b,14,18 *13bThen a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"14 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."*

*18 “Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel--all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him."*

God asked Elijah what he was doing on Horeb. Of course, God knew the answer, but Elijah needed to express it. I think this is a common tool that God uses to get us to assess what is real. What are you doing where you are, reader? Take a moment to think how you would respond to your Maker if He were to ask you that right now.

Elijah told God how zealous he had been for God and how alone he felt because of it. He told how he was fleeing again for his life. God had news for Elijah. He told him to anoint the coming kings and his own successor. That was a vision for the near future and motivation to get back to work. Then God had a correction to make to Elijah’s pity party. He was not alone. There were 7000 people who had not worshiped Baal.

At times we get discouraged and think we are the only ones that are serious about God. Individuals and churches can feel that way, but there are always others that love God. He always keeps a remnant for Himself. They may not look and act like you do, but God has kept their hearts, and they are not going the way of the world.

Consider: Do you feel like you are all alone, like your work is done and you haven’t been successful? Don’t worry or fear. God is at work. He has more for you to do. He has a disciple waiting for instruction. He has thousands that love Him more than the world. The work is not up to you. It is God’s.

**June 27 Evening**

John 14:5-7 *5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" 6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."*

Jesus told His disciples of His imminent departure and that at that time they would know the way to Him. Thomas asked how they could possibly know the way when they didn’t even know where He was going. Jesus had just said He was going to the Father. How many times does the Lord speak something to us, yet we don’t hear a thing?

Jesus answered with a triple “I AM” statement. *"I am the way and the truth and the life.”* Jesus is the way to the Father. The way is not mapped out, nor is it a series of do’s and don’ts. The way is a person. Unless you go through this person, Jesus, you can never come to the Father. Anyone that ever lived that came to the Father came through Jesus, whether they knew His name or not. From Abraham to doubting Thomas to Billy Graham, each had only one way to access the Father, through Jesus Christ. It is the same for us.

He is truth. His life and words are truth, yes, but truth is a person. The word of truth became flesh. You cannot possess real truth without Jesus. He is life. Without Him there is no life. Those who would downplay Jesus’ role and importance must disregard this verse as the words of an egomaniac. Either He is God or one of the most demented men to ever live.

Then Jesus makes it very plain. If you want to get to God, realize that knowing me is knowing God. If you’ve seen me then you have seen God. This was an explanation of Himself as the way. Jesus is the visible manifestation of the invisible God. Seeing Him is the only way to see God.

Consider: Is He the way and the truth and the life to you?

**June 28 Morning**

1 Kings 19:20-21 *20 Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother good-by," he said, "and then I will come with you." "Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?" 21 So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant*.

Elijah left Mount Horeb with fresh inspiration. He was going to train someone to take his place. He saw the man God had told him to call and threw his cloak upon him. It was a picture of the anointing of God coming upon him and covering him. We have the same picture in the New Testament when the Apostle Paul says, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 13:14).

Elisha wanted to go say good-bye to his parents, but Elijah asked him to consider what has just happened. He was called of God. What would hold him back or deter him? We read nothing of him saying good-bye. That reminds us of the person that wanted to follow Jesus but wanted to wait until his parents died. Jesus told him to let the dead bury the dead, but come and follow him (Matthew 8:22).

Elisha must have considered this to be a great calling. He burned the implements that he used to make a living and roasted the oxen. He fed the people with the meat. He no longer had anything to go back to. Today we would call this “burning our bridges.” Elisha planned to go forward and never look back. If God wanted to use him, he wanted to be undistracted and completely available to God. We will see in coming devotions how he highly prized the calling and anointing of God. His training started as a servant to Elijah. He would observe the man that God was using and learn from him.

Consider: Many of us need a mentor to give us an example of what it is to walk in the Spirit. We often have such poor examples that we may need to search for a life we respect and can learn from. Do you have a godly mentor?

**June 28 Evening**

John 14:15-17 *15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.*

Do you love Jesus? Then you obey His command. What is His command? *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”* John 15:12 You can’t really answer “yes” and harbor anger in your heart toward someone. Jesus made that clear. To love others, you must be forgiving, willing to put them first, and most of all, you must be willing to allow God’s love to flow through you.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus said that if you want the Holy Spirit, you need to ask the Father to give Him to you (Luke 11:13). John reminds us that Jesus had one other condition, obedience. But it is not obedience to the 613 rules in the Old

Testament. Jesus narrowed it down to one, *“…obey what I command.”*

If you will do that by His grace, He promises to ask the Father to send you the Counselor, the Spirit of truth. Here is the great difference in Christianity. Other religions taught blood atonement, ways to God, and even love for others, but Christianity teaches that God will come and live in and through you. That was something totally new to those who listened to Jesus. It is not a “do it yourself” religion. It is an invitation to personally experience Life, Himself, on a daily, hourly, minute-by-minute basis.

If you are of God, then you love and believe in the One He sent. If you love the One He sent, then you obey Him. If you obey Him (loving one another) then you will experience the presence of the Counselor, the Spirit of Truth, living in you forever. The world cannot love because it is self-focused. It chooses to obey its selfish whims. That is why it cannot receive the Counselor.

Consider: The last words in verse 17 tell us the difference between the presence of the Spirit before and after Pentecost in two words, “with” and “in”. Are you experiencing “in”?

**June 29 Morning**

1 Kings 20:27-28 *27 When the Israelites were also mustered and given provisions, they marched out to meet them. The Israelites camped opposite them like two small flocks of goats, while the Arameans covered the countryside.28 The man of God came up and told the king of Israel, "This is what the LORD says: 'Because the Arameans think the LORD is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands, and you will know that I am the LORD.'"*

The patience and mercy of God is amazing. God is still trying to convert evil

Ahab. Israel is only a remnant of what it once was. When a king came to plunder Israel, the LORD told Ahab that He would give him the victory so that he would know the LORD was God. He had already seen fire from heaven, saw the end of a three-year drought at the prophet’s word, and seen the prophet miraculously preserved. Why would God continue to deal with him? The answer is because God is not willing that any should perish. He seeks after the hardest hearts and gives them more proof.

He gave him one victory, but the enemy came again. This second time the enemy was doomed before they started. The people had begun to return to Jehovah because of the ministry of Elijah. The enemy said that Jehovah was a god of the hills and not the plains. Oops! Limiting God is a sure way to end up with your foot in your mouth. He is God over all and will gladly prove it.

In spite of being vastly outnumbered, the little bands of Israelites defeated the army of the Arameans. God caused a wall to fall on 27,000 of them. Ahab listened carefully to the prophet’s instruction going into the battle but did not seek his advice on what to do once he had the victory. He reverted to leaning on his own wisdom and made a costly mistake. How like us! Under pressure in an impossible situation, we seek God and He delivers us. Then we go back to our own ways. Keep seeking! Keep obeying!

Remember: We need God’s instruction in difficulties, but we also need it when things are going well.

**June 29 Evening**

John 14:19-21 *19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. 21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."*

Jesus is no longer physically manifest among us in the form of the incarnation. The world no longer sees Him, but do you see Him? He promised His disciples that they would, and I don’t believe that He meant the short time between His resurrection and ascension. He goes on to say that they will realize He is in them. That happened after the ascension. How did the disciples see Christ after the ascension?

They saw Him as the body of Christ functioned throughout the book of Acts and onward through time. You see Him every time you see the church minister in all its varied forms of service. When Ananias touched Saul of Tarsus, Jesus touched him. When Peter and John laid hands on the Samaritans, Jesus touched them. When the transformed Paul spoke the words of life, his hearers heard Jesus. And when your church acts in the Spirit, Jesus is acting in your world and seen by those who love Him.

Not only that, but you also see Him at work in the details of your life. If you are one that loves Him and obeys His command to love, then He promised to show Himself to you. When the world says “coincidence”, you see the hand of God. When a verse of Scripture is spoken on the radio, and then comes up in you devotional time, speaking to your current situation, you hear the voice of Jesus. As you observe the beauty of nature, you see lessons from Jesus to give you insight as to how He is working in your life. The world doesn’t see it and might think you are one card short of a full deck, but you know He has shown Himself to you. It is then that you realize that you are in Jesus, and He is in you.

Consider: Have you seen Jesus today? Watch for Him, and you will see Him!

**June 30 Morning**

1 Kings 22:30-31,34 *30 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will enter the battle in disguise, but you wear your royal robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle.31 Now the king of Aram had ordered his thirty-two chariot commanders, "Do not fight with anyone, small or great, except the king of Israel."*

*34 But someone drew his bow at random and hit the king of Israel between the sections of his armor. The king told his chariot driver, "Wheel around and get me out of the fighting. I've been wounded."*

Good king Jehoshaphat must have been awfully naïve or under some kind of spell to want to help evil Ahab. The prophet of God warned them, and they still went into battle. Why in the world would good king Jehoshaphat wear royal robes and become a target while he let evil Ahab hide in regular soldier garb? You can’t outwit God. If God says something will happen, it will happen, try as you may to prevent it. In the book of Chronicles, we will see that Jehoshaphat repented over his error of uniting with Ahab.

The forces of Aram were ordered to attack the king. Jehoshaphat saw them coming for him and fled to safety. God allowed him to escape even though he was doing something wrong in the eyes of God. But Ahab has had his chances. It was God’s time to finish his reign. After all he had seen and heard, he would not surrender himself to God. A stray arrow found its way between the plates of his armor and he bled to death in his chariot. The chariot was washed out in Samaria, and the dogs licked up the blood, just as was prophesied.

The odds are not what matters in the battle of life. God is on the throne of heaven. What matters is what you have done with His revelation of Himself to you. Has it humbled you and broken your proud spirit so that you are His, or are you stubbornly refusing to listen to Him? The outcome of these two men’s lives was dramatically different. Both were involved in the same error, but their hearts were different and responded to God differently.

Consider: How are you responding to God’s instruction to you?

**June 30 Evening**

John 14:23,26-27 *23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*

*26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

Jesus promised that, if we loved Him and obeyed His teaching, the Father and He would come and make their home in us. The Holy Spirit will live in us. Here is a clear picture of the three in one God. Think about what it means for Him to be at home in us. If God sets up His home in you, it will certainly transform your outward life. If He is at home in you, your life will express the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and gentleness to others that He is in you. Perhaps you’ve met someone, and you can tell Jesus is at home in him or her. It is God’s desire to make His home in each of us, but there is a prerequisite, to love Him and obey His teaching.

A few verses later Jesus explained how that is possible. The Holy Spirit would be sent to teach and remind us of Jesus’ words. That is His main role within us. He is teaching us the perspective of the Father, what to say, how to say it, and His own attitude toward the world around us. By reminding us of the words of Jesus, He is teaching us to distinguish light from dark and showing us how to respond.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is the Father and the Son at home in us. His presence is the peace of Christ. That peace transcends situations, because we know that the God who oversees all things is with us through it. The peace of the world is dependent on situations being calm. The peace of Jesus is only dependent on His presence. That is why He can again say, “Do not let your hearts be troubled”, and adds, “do not be afraid.” If the God of creation is at home in you, He will surely see you through to the glorious future He has planned for His own children.

Consider: Have you discovered His peace?

**July 1 Morning**

2 Kings 2:9-11 *9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied.10 "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours--otherwise not."11 As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.*

Elijah had done as the LORD commanded him and called Elisha to be the prophet in his place. The time had come for Elijah to depart this world and Elisha knew it. He would not leave the side of Elijah even though Elijah asked him to stay behind. He must have known by the Spirit of God that if he stuck close to Elijah he would be blessed.

When they arrived at the place to which the LORD had led them, Elijah asked if there was anything he could do for Elisha. Elisha asked for a double portion of his spirit. The spirit of a man is his relationship and zeal for God. Elijah left it in God’s hands by saying that if he saw him taken from him he would know his request was granted. Sure enough, he saw it happen.

When Elijah called Elisha he threw his cloak over him. Now he left his cloak behind for him. When we look through the life of Elisha, we find twice as many miracles recorded as were recorded in the life of Elijah. He did receive the double portion he asked for.

What would you have asked for? This reminds us of Solomon’s request for wisdom to rule. What we ask for depends on the calling the LORD has placed on our lives. The desire behind our request should be that our calling be effective and influential for the sake of the Kingdom of God. If our heart is to serve in the most God honoring way possible, I believe God is willing to grant our request. If our request is to be equipped to please our King, we should expect it to be granted.

Consider: We need to show the tenacity that Elisha showed in not leaving Elijah’s side until the LORD equips us for our calling.

**July 1 Evening**

John 15:1-3 *1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.*

We begin with another “I AM” statement of Jesus, *"I am the true vine”.* Jesus taught us to see Him everywhere, in water, bread, light, gates, and vines. They are all a shadow of the real, of Jesus. He created the world so that it would be full of reminders of all that He is to us. In Him, we see analogies of Him in everything. It is hard to not fix our eyes upon Jesus because He is symbolized in the things we come in contact with constantly. If we will slow down and open our spiritual eyes, we will see that the earth is full of the glory of the Lord (Isaiah 6:3).

Jesus tells us our relationship with Him is analogous to a vine and its branches. God the Father prunes away branches that don’t bear fruit. Either they have no life in them, or they exist for another purpose. Professional pruners know which branches are not serving the purpose of the gardener. They have no fruit buds. The shade they create keeps the light and air from the developing fruit on the good branches. That is why they are lopped off. But even branches that bear fruit can develop side branches that do not. They are pruned so that the nutrition will continue to go into the fruit bearing areas. They are pruned to aim them into the light. That makes them even more fruitful.

Is God pruning some area of your life or ministry? That is because it is a distraction. His purpose is to make you more fruitful. He prunes you through His word. The Greek word “clean” in verse 3 also means “pruned.” The Word of God will prune our lives, cutting away areas that are headed in the wrong direction, or have no potential to bear fruit. Are you allowing the Word of God to prune (clean) your life?

Challenge: Allow God’s Word to cut away the fruitless areas of your life so that you can bear more fruit.

**July 2 Morning**

2 Kings 3:15 *15 But now bring me a harpist." While the harpist was playing, the hand of the LORD came upon Elisha*

Elisha became the prophet in the place of Elijah. The king of Moab rebelled against Israel and refused to pay tribute, so the king of Israel, Joram, asked for assistance from the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom. They tried to make a sneak attack through the desert, but ran out of water. Jehoshaphat suggested inquiring of a prophet of God, and Elisha was called.

Elisha told Joram he should inquire of the gods of his parents. Out of respect for the presence of the king of Judah, he did inquire of God. It is interesting to note how he went about hearing from God. It is a theme often repeated in the Old Testament. He asks for a harpist. Remember it was David’s harp playing that set Saul free from the oppressing spirit that troubled him. David had assigned instrumentalists to play in the Temple. It seems that Elisha needed music to quiet his spirit that he might hear from God.

The gift of music is, indeed, a spiritual thing. It can draw us to God and still our spirits. We need to be cautious as to the type of music we listen to. When you need to hear the voice of the Spirit to direct you, you might consider listening to something that was written to the praise of God. He inhabits the praises of His people.

Music that was written to the praise of man or worldliness can have the opposite effect on us. It can stir our flesh in the direction of the suggestions in the lyrics. It seems that everywhere we go we are bombarded with “popular” music. Most of it promotes illicit relationships. Choose your music wisely and have a good collection of music that is written to the praise and glory of God.

Consider: When you are troubled, tune everything else out and praise the Lord in song. You will find the Lord brings the answers to the troubles that face you just as He did for Elisha.

**July 2 Evening**

John 15:9-11 *9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

The Father loves the Son with a perfect love throughout eternity. That is the love that Jesus has for you! The Apostle Paul prayed that we might have the power to grasp how high and long and wide and deep that love is (Ephesians 3:18). How could He love us so? He sees what He is making us into. He sees the church complete as His bride. He sees you conformed into His image, so He perseveres in your transformation. What grace and love to patiently take such material as you and me and continue working with the hope of such a glorious end.

Do you want Him to continue working on you, staying in that perfect love? You must obey His commands, just as He obeyed His Father’s commands and remained in His love. He summed them up by saying that you must love the Lord your God with your all and your neighbor as yourself. That is only possible when we remain in Jesus.

Lest you become discouraged with the impossibility of the task, He told us this so His joy would be in us. He didn’t say, “So that you will be joyful.” He spoke of giving us His very own joy. That is the joy that sees the end product. That is the joy that knows God is triumphant. It’s the joy that sees by faith that all things are working together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purposes (Romans 8:28). Jesus added that our joy would be complete if we remain in His love, topped off and to the rim!

Man seeks happiness in so many things other than His Creator. Happiness is fleeting. It is controlled by circumstances. Joy is a deep abiding reality that circumstances cannot touch. It comes from a secure relationship that is richer and more fulfilling than anything the world has to offer.

Meditation: Do you have His joy? Remain in His love.

**July 3 Morning**

2 Kings 3:20-22 *20 The next morning, about the time for offering the sacrifice, there it was--water flowing from the direction of Edom! And the land was filled with water.21 Now all the Moabites had heard that the kings had come to fight against them; so every man, young and old, who could bear arms was called up and stationed on the border.22 When they got up early in the morning, the sun was shining on the water. To the Moabites across the way, the water looked red-like blood.*

The LORD told Elisha to have the army dig ditches, and that God was going to fill those ditches with water so the armies of Israel, Judah and Edom could drink. The next morning water flowed from the direction of Edom and filled the ditches. The able bodied men of Moab had gathered to resist the attack. When they saw the reflection of the sunrise and thought the water was the blood of the armies that had come to fight them, they rushed headlong into an ambush of ready, thirst-quenched soldiers.

The day before the armies in league with Israel had thought God was against them, bringing them to defeat through thirst. Instead, it was God’s way of getting them to stop their plans so that He could work. We are often ready to jump into a spiritual battle, ready to take the enemy’s territory, but God has His own way of doing things. He may introduce a difficulty to get us to seek His face and go His direction. The very solution to their difficulty was the means God used to trick the army of Moab. Two birds with one stone! The lesson was that the hand of God would work in their favor if they would seek His face and listen to Him.

Consider: The next time you face a dead end and feel the Lord is working against you, stop and seek His face. Find out how He would have you proceed. The difficulty may be preparation for a victory in your life.

**July 3 Evening**

John 15:15-17 *15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other.*

Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets were called God’s servants. In Jesus’ day, the disciples that followed a teacher served their leader like a servant. Jesus made it possible for many to enter into a relationship that few under the old covenant had experienced. God called Abraham His friend and spoke to him in a very personal way. He entered into a covenant with him personally.

There are a number of parallels between God’s friendship with Abraham and

Jesus’ friendship with us. He calls us before we have done anything deserving of His call. He enters into a blood covenant with us. He speaks intimately with us. He does not hide from us what He is about to do. He allows us to intercede for others. He calls for an expression of faith. He makes our life fruitful. In the life of

Abraham, the friend of God, we can see the new covenant relationship with God.

Abraham’s children are even a picture of the two kinds of fruit we produce as Christians. We need to get a handle on the superabundant grace expressed in the fact that God would call us friends. Do we honor Him as our closest and most highly esteemed friend?

God is after fruit that will last in our lives. Our friendship should cause us to act at His instruction. His instruction is to love each other. If we will obey, we will see lasting results from our relationship in Him. So much of the business of Christians does not produce lasting fruit because it is not based on obedience to Jesus’ great command. Loving each other as He loves us will produce fruit naturally. It isn’t forced. It is a product of allowing His life to flow through us.

Consider the wonderful reality that you are the friend of God.

**July 4 Morning**

2 Kings 4:1-3 *1 The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves."2 Elisha replied to her, "How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?" "Your servant has nothing there at all," she said, "except a little oil."3 Elisha said, "Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few.*

There are times when a faithful man of God will fall into financial difficulty. It does not mean he has been unfaithful or does not have faith. It is a test of faith. This man who served in the company of the prophets died in debt. His widow was afraid the collectors would take the sons as slaves in payment for the debt. She asked the prophet of God, Elisha, what to do. He had nothing to give her. When he was called by God, he left everything behind and used his yoke for wood and his plow oxen as a sacrifice.

The man of God asked what she had left. Sometimes we only have a little for God to work with, but He can do a lot with a little. If we are willing to demonstrate our faith by putting that little bit into His hands, He multiplies it. Do you remember the fish and loaves and the widow who fed Elijah? Tell me, what do you have in your house? Come on, voice it! Most of us have plenty. Will we put it in God’s hands?

Elisha tells her to borrow as many jars as she can from her neighbors. Faith takes a big basket to market. Expect God to answer in a big way. She began pouring the little oil she had left and it kept coming out of that jar. It continued to flow until every last jar was full. If she had a million more, they would have all been full. The miracle stops at the end of our faith. When you expect God to move, prepare in a big way. If God has directed it, you will find you’ll wish you had prepared more jars. The oil was sold to pay their debts and provide a pension.

Remember: Though the righteous fall into difficulty, God will provide when they place their trust in Him.

**July 4 Evening**

John 15:18-20 *18 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20 Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.*

When Jesus was a child, he grew in favor with God and man. Early in His ministry, they wondered at the gracious words that came out of His mouth. In the last week they greeted Him like a king. But Jesus knew what was coming. He had seen it in His hometown. He had seen after the feeding of the 5000. He knew the crowds would end up crying, “Crucify Him!” Every time He spoke a truth they did not want to hear. Their reaction was the same as their ancestors’. As long as the words were to their liking and they could get something out of it for themselves, they praised Him. But when He spoke the truth about the prejudices and selfishness, they looked for reasons to believe He was not the One. Their unbelief turned to hatred. Not knowing the Father, they had only one agenda, self-promotion.

Children of God will meet the same reaction. People are attracted to anyone that expresses the fruits of the Spirit. They will speak favorably and act as a friend. The test comes when you must speak the truth to them. When you are an example of putting God first, the loyalty they thought you owed them comes into question. The more they probe, the less they like you until the one time “friend” turns to hatred. You never changed. Your loyalty was always to God first. They just found out you do not belong to the world. You don’t have the same goals or values. You opinion of sin in their life makes them furious.

Should we expect anything better? If they treated our example, our Master, this way then it is no wonder that the world treats us the same. There are children of God by grace, through faith in Jesus, and there are children of the world. We can love them, but they can only hate us. Pray that they become children of God just as we did.

Remember: When you are persecuted for righteousness sake, rejoice and be glad. Great is your reward in heaven.

**July 5 Morning**

2 Kings 4:32-34 *32 When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch.33 He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD.34 Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy's body grew warm.*

A wealthy woman asked her husband to make a room for Elisha so that whenever he and his servant came to that town they would have a place they could stay. In return, Elisha asked God to grant her desire to have a son. She was very concerned when he made the promise, because she did not want to have false hopes. Sure enough, a year later she had a son. Don’t be afraid to believe that God can bring to pass the desire He has placed in your heart.

One day the boy had a headache and died. The woman ran to Elisha and told him, “Didn’t I tell you not to raise false hopes in me?” Then Elisha knew something was wrong with the boy. He immediately sent his servant to run and lay his staff on the boy while he followed. When the servant laid the staff on the boy, there was no change. There are times when we do what we believe the LORD is directing but we do not see results.

Then Elisha went into the room alone with the boy and prayed. If our first leading does not bring results, pray. Ask the LORD what to do next. Apparently, at the LORD’s direction, he did what sounds like artificial resuscitation. He did this not once but twice. The first time brought some results, but then he repeated what the LORD had showed him a second time. Then the boy awoke from death.

Remember: If the LORD takes away what He has promised you, trust Him. Even when you have acted at His direction and seen no results, trust Him. Do just what Elisha did. Pray! Ask God what to do next. Then keep doing that until He directs you otherwise or you see the answer.

**July 5 Evening**

John 16:7-8, 13 *7 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:*

*13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.*

We sometimes fantasize about what it would have been like to walk with Jesus.

Surely we would have better questions and been better disciples than the likes of Peter and Thomas. To have seen the miracles right before our eyes would surely have made us such believers that we would have clung to every word. Don’t bet on it! One thing we can learn from Scripture is that we are all of like nature. Whether the Children of Israel in the wilderness, or the fearful disciples of Jesus, or the timid followers of Christ today, we are people in frames of dust (Psalm 103:14).

In this passage, Jesus is saying that you are actually better off today than to have lived in the physical presence of Jesus! Remember, the Holy Spirit was not in them. If you were there, He would not have been *in* you. You would not have had the conviction of sin that you have in this day. You would not have understood His instruction like you do today. It is more than likely that you would have acted just as His disciples acted, or maybe worse.

What is better than the incarnation of God as a living, breathing example right before our eyes? It is His indwelling presence to teach and counsel us through our daily situations. Exactly like Jesus, the Spirit only speaks the Father’s words to your heart. He speaks the wonderful encouraging words of the Second Coming and eternal rewards. He assures us of the final conquest by the Kingdom of God and His glorious reign over the earth. What a friend! What an encourager! Now are you sure you would rather have lived in the days when Jesus walked the earth?

Admonition: Live in communion with the Holy Spirit today!

**July 6 Morning**

2 Kings 5:10-12 *10 Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."11 But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy.12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.*

Naaman was a great commander in the army of the king of Aram. He had contracted some type of skin disease. His wife’s servant was a young girl from Israel. The young girl spoke of a prophet that could cure Naaman. With the king’s permission, he journeyed to Israel to be cured. The king of Israel thought it was a ploy to have reason for the king of Aram to go to war with Israel. Elisha sent word that the king of Israel need not worry. He asked that Naaman be sent to him so that Naaman would know there was a prophet in Israel. Actually, God was after Naaman. He was pursuing him by means of his affliction. If Naaman believed Jehovah’s prophet could cure, then he would believe in Jehovah.

Naaman had other issues to be dealt with, namely his pride. Instead of going out to meet this esteemed commander, Elisha just sent a messenger. God’s direction for healing was a humbling thing. The Jordan is dirty and mucky. Pride sent Naaman into a rage at this simple request, but his servants calmed him down and helped him to humble himself. After the seventh dip, Naaman came up with skin like a young boy’s. He had a conversion experience. His outward cleansing caused him to trust in God for an inward cleansing. He took soil back from Israel so that he could worship the God that he now knew to be the one true God.

The biggest miracle was not that his skin was cleansed but that his heart was changed. God pursues everyone with the desire to see them know Him. Will we humble ourselves and let Him do a miracle in our lives, or demand that He meet our expectations?

Consider: Humble yourself in the sight of the LORD and He will lift you up.

**July 6 Evening**

John 16:31-33 *31 "You believe at last!" Jesus answered. 32 "But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. 33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

The disciples had a difficult time understanding the analogies that Jesus used. During His last evening with them, they were struggling with His expression*, “in a little while you will see me no more and then in a little while you will see me.”* Then Jesus told them that He would no longer use figures of speech and explained that He was going to return to the Father. Then they believed.

Yes, they now declared their belief, but to believe and to stake your life on that belief are two different things. Jesus warned them that their belief was not strong enough to keep them at His side. Though He would be alone, the Father would be with Him. As His disciples, we may have to walk that same road. In obedience to the Spirit, we may lose the company of those who have walked with us, but we will not be alone.

Jesus was concerned for the turmoil they would experience during the coming days. If they knew He was returning they could have peace in Him. Even though the world is troubling and persecutes us, we know that He will return. Just as He returned to them, He will return to this earth in His glory.

Take heart! Be encouraged! The world will not continue on its present course forever. When He returns, the conquest He has already gained over the world will be manifested. He will share that conquest with us. His reign will be complete. Don’t let the trouble of the world bring you down.

Remember: You’ve read the final chapter! Have peace in Him.

**July 7 Morning**

2 Kings 5:25-26 *25 Then he went in and stood before his master Elisha.*

*"Where have you been, Gehazi?" Elisha asked. "Your servant didn't go anywhere," Gehazi answered.26 But Elisha said to him, "Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money, or to accept clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or menservants and maidservants?*

After Naaman was healed, he offered Elisha a small fortune. Elisha refused to take anything and sent Naaman home in peace. Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, thought they had missed an opportunity to make some financial gain. He ran after the caravan and made a very creative lie. He told Naaman that two prophets showed up just after he left and they wanted to give them some silver and sets of clothes.

Naaman gladly gave these to Gehazi.

Gehazi brought them back and hid them. Elisha gave Gehazi a chance to come clean by asking him where he had gone. Gehazi lied again and said, “Nowhere.” After all the miracles he had seen, all the supernatural discernment in Elisha, you wonder how he thought he would get away with this. Not only that, but he had so much evidence that there is a God who is just and righteous.

Elisha told Gehazi that his spirit was there when Naaman got down from his chariot. I imagine Gehazi’s heart stopped about then. Elisha asked, “*Is this the time to take money, or to accept clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or menservants and maidservants?”* Is this the time to get rich? Should our simple obedience to God warrant earthly treasure, or are we laying up treasure in heaven? Gehazi demonstrated that he was after earthly reward. God does supply our physical need, but where is our heart set? Why do we serve? If we have to make up stories, we know something is amiss.

Remember Jesus’ words: Lay up your treasure in heaven where neither moth nor rust corrupts and where thieves cannot break in and steal it.

**July 7 Evening**

John 17:3-5 *3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true*

*God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. 4 I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.*

A dictionary might define eternal life as a life without beginning or end, but

Jesus defines it as knowing the only true Eternal One. There is only one true God.

Jesus very name means salvation of the Eternal One. What does it mean to know Him? A few of the ideas behind this Greek word include: to learn, to know, come to know, to perceive, to become acquainted with. The ideas include an ever-increasing perception in relationship.

Jesus prayed a prayer of thanks for being able to bring glory to the Father. His complete obedience to the Father’s will gave us a demonstration of the heart of the Father. In doing that, He express the glory of God. Though He had not yet finished the course, He had determined in His heart that He would, and by faith He counted it done.

In verse five, we see the longing of Jesus to return to the presence of the Father. There He would share the glory of the Father, for They are one. It was His existence in eternity past. Do you see the difference between walking with God in this world and being there in eternity in His presence unhindered by these bodies in their present form? For us, it will be the continuation of what we have begun on earth, knowing Him.

Consider: Have you begun to know Him, the only true God, and Jesus, His salvation? Increase in that knowledge of Him today by bringing Him glory, that is doing His will. Then you will be completing the work He has given you to do.

**July 8 Morning**

2 Kings 6:15-17 *15 When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked.16 "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."17 And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.*

When the king of Aram warred against Israel, Elisha sent word to the king of Israel informing him of the places Aram’s army would camp. The king of Aram thought one of his generals was a spy. When he learned it was the prophet Elisha that knew by Divine power what his plans were, he surrounded the city where Elisha was to capture him.

The servant of Elisha got up that morning and saw the army surrounding the city in wait for them. He was frightened, but Elisha wasn’t. Elisha could see in the spirit. That is why he knew where the enemy camped. That is why he knew he did not need to fear. Then Elisha asked God to let his servant see what he could see. There in the hills around them was a much greater army, a spiritual army. The hills were full of horses with chariots of fire.

If we look in the carnal realm, we see only what looks to be too great for us. Enemies seem to have the upper hand. Situations look impossible. Odds appear to be too great. But if we will let God open our eyes of faith so that we can see in the spirit, we will see resources that our enemy has no idea we have.

Elisha single handedly (through the power of God) captured this army. That is because one person and God are a majority. It doesn’t matter how great the numbers are against you, as long as God is on your side and you are listening to and obeying Him.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes, so that I can see the reality of the spiritual realm.

**July 8 Evening**

John 17:17-19 *17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.*

In John 15, Jesus said the disciples were already cleaned (or pruned) by the Word. He prayed to the Father to use the Word to sanctify them. Sanctify means to set apart for a special use. As we read on in the prayer, we see that this definition of ‘sanctify’ goes with the thoughts that followed.

Jesus then prayed that as He was sent into the world, so He was sending them into the world. They were to be light in the midst of darkness, lambs sent out among wolves. They were to carry the convicting message of light and life to people that often do not want to hear, and like Jesus, they would die for their faith.

Following this understanding of the word “sanctify,” we would then read the next verse to say that Jesus set Himself apart that they might be truly set apart. Without His sacrifice on the cross, there is no possibility that we could be set apart. Without His complete purity bearing our sin we would never have been able to receive the Spirit who sets us apart and anoints us to go into the world as He went into the world.

In a similar way, our commitment to purity and faithfulness affects those to whom we minister. Of course we do not provide the sacrifice for sin; only Christ can do that. But we do set a living example that encourages them to walk down this path. As you allow the word of God to cleanse and purify your life, you encourage others that there is hope. You give them inspiration to allow the Word to do the same in them. It is not just for your sake alone that the Word is sanctifying your life. Everyone in the body affects all the others to whom they are connected. To choose to compromise not only affects you, but all others in the body. Your commitment to growing in sanctification affects others more than you realize.

Consider: Allow the truth, the Word, to sanctify you.

**July 9 Morning**

2 Kings 7:8-9 *8 The men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp and entered one of the tents. They ate and drank, and carried away silver, gold and clothes, and went off and hid them. They returned and entered another tent and took some things from it and hid them also.9 Then they said to each other, "We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace."*

The Arameans laid siege to the capital of Israel, Samaria. The people inside the city were slowly starving to death. Some of them even ate their own babies. The king of Israel became furious against the LORD and His prophet and determined to kill him. When he arrived at the room of the prophet Elisha, Elisha prophesied that the next day there would be an abundance of food. That was very hard to believe, but the king backed off.

A group of lepers decided to go out to the Aramean camp. They decided that staying or going they would probably die, but by going they might find mercy. When they arrived, the army was gone and all their goods were still there. They began to raid the tents, hiding the goods, until their conscience got to them. They knew they needed to tell the starving people of the city.

The king of Israel thought it was a trap, so he sent a small group of chariots to see what had happened. They followed a trail of forsaken goods all the way to the Jordan River. The LORD had caused the sound of a great army to frighten the Arameans away.

We are like those beggars when we come to Christ. We have lived in a land starving for truth. People are desperate. We found the answer in abundance and begin to stash away the truth in our hearts, hiding it there. Then our conscience gets to us. What about all the others, who are holed up in the city, slowly dying, waiting for someone to tell them the good news, “The enemy is defeated!”? We are not doing right by keeping this discovery to ourselves.

Consider: *This is a day of good news… Let’s go at once and report this*.

**July 9 Evening**

John 17:20-22 *20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.*

In the verses that preceded these, Jesus was praying for believers to be sanctified (set apart) through the truth of the Word. He followed that request with the above passage that asked that those who would come to believe through their message would be sanctified also. If those who preach the word and those who receive the message are all set apart for God, they will be one. We will have one Lord, one faith, and one desire.

Jesus describes that unity as the same relationship that He has with the Father. They are each in the other. Jesus’ heart is in the Father, and the Father’s heart is in the Son. Jesus demonstrated this by doing only what the Father showed Him. How do we experience that kind of unity? By being in the Son. If I am in the Son and He is in you, then I am in you and you are in me. We share the heart of the Son and seek only to do His will. That does not mean that we will never disagree, but that we will both be seeking His will. Once His will is plain to us both, we will be in unity. When the world sees us, though we are from all cultures and status of life, in that kind of supernatural unity, they will realize they are witnessing a miracle. They will know that the Father did indeed send the Son to be their Savior. Are you in the Son so that the world can see this wonder?

Jesus gave us the glory that was given Him. I believe that is the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to express the heart of the Father in words and in actions. If we will yield ourselves to His life and power, we will express the glory of God. Those who do so will be in complete unity. There is the heart of evangelistic effectiveness.

Meditation: To be fruitful for the kingdom of God, live in Him today!

**July 10 Morning**

2 Kings 11:13-14 *13 When Athaliah heard the noise made by the guards and the people, she went to the people at the temple of the LORD.14 She looked and there was the king, standing by the pillar, as the custom was. The officers and the trumpeters were beside the king, and all the people of the land were rejoicing and blowing trumpets. Then Athaliah tore her robes and called out, "Treason!*

*Treason!"*

When Amaziah died from the wounds inflicted by Jehu, his mother, Athaliah, decided to take over as supreme ruler. This wicked lady killed all but one of her own grandchildren. A sister of Amaziah hid one of her nephews, a son of the king, in the Temple. When the child, Joash, was barely old enough to reign, Athaliah reaped what she had sown. The priest Jehoida declared Joash king at the tender age of 7. Athaliah heard everyone shouting and clapping, and she yelled, "Treason, treason!" The people could have answered her, “Yes that was your crime.” The wicked often accuse others of the things they are guilty of. They are familiar with the sin because they live it daily, but in their twisted minds they have cleared themselves while accusing everyone else. They are so shocked when justice against them prevails.

The people may have wondered what happened to the justice of God. As time passed and Joash was aging, the animosity of the people was growing. The selfish reign of Athaliah and her love for Baal was causing the animosity that would erupt in the justice of God. He has His perfect time for everything.

When we see wickedness prevailing and are accused of the very things our adversary is guilty of, remember, Satan is the accuser of the brethren. God will deal with wickedness when the time is right. The people of the land also tore down the temple of Baal in Judah and killed the priest of Baal. Then they made a covenant with God and with their new king.

Consider: God is not looking the other way. He is laying the groundwork for His will to be done in His perfect time.

**July 10 Evening**

John 20:6-8 *6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside.*

*He saw and believed.*

Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb while it was still dark on Sunday morning. She found the tomb empty. Running back to the disciples, she told what she had found. Peter and John ran to the tomb. Peter arrived second but went in first. The strips of linen with which the body was wrapped were lying there. The head cloth was folded and set apart from the linen strips.

Since Jesus is the head of the church, His body, someone has suggested that it was a picture of His work as the head being accomplished. The body material was in a big pile, showing we have a lot of work left to do. The thought is true, but it was more an evidentiary statement than a theological one. Grave robbers would have taken this valuable material or left the body wrapped in it to carry it away.

When John got up the nerve to step inside, he saw the same thing and believed. Why would the sight of these cloths cause him to believe? They were left as they would have been had Jesus actually come back to life. Up till that time, they dared not believe Jesus many statements of rising again, because the brutal murder had crushed their hopes. They did not want to be disappointed again, but the evidence was too strong. They had to believe, and soon they would see their resurrected Lord with their own eyes.

Has disappointment and heartache caused you to set aside your hopes? Has the pain of this world caused you to put your faith on the shelf? Jesus never promised us safety from the pain of this fallen world. He did promise He would be with us through it. Step back in time for a moment, and dare to walk into the tomb with John. See the linen strips and the head shroud neatly folded? There is more than this life. He has gone before us through death to make a way for us.

Consider: Will you dare to let your heart believe again? Then He will meet you too.

**July 11 Morning**

2 Kings 18:3-5 *3 He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done.4 He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.)5 Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him.*

Hezekiah was an exceptional king. As you read through the kings of Judah, you find a few of whom it was written, “He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD…” That is almost always followed by the word, “however.” There was always some compromise. The standard was King David. He had a heart after God. In our passage today, we find a rare exception in Hezekiah. He destroyed everything that had an influence that suggested the worship of any other God than Jehovah. The bronze snake that Moses had made in the wilderness was even destroyed.

We can take objects that were meant for our good and turn them into idols. Most of the blessings of God in our life can become a snare to us. There are times when their influence must put out of our lives. It is not that the object itself is bad, it is the way in which we are tempted to worship the object. It is the way in which it distracts us from the LORD. Hezekiah was so uncompromising that none of these distracting things were allowed to remain.

What an epitaph! *There was no one like him among the kings of Judah.* God is looking for those who are willing to go all out, to be unique, to blaze a trail of total dedication. Jesus is our ultimate example in that.

Meditation: May we allow Jesus’ life in us to show total dedication in our daily lives.

**July 11 Evening**

John 20:15-17 *15 "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"*

The one who is forgiven much loves much. She was the first to the grave that Sunday morning of resurrection. She wanted to adorn it with spices so that she could visit it even as the body decomposed. She feared it was stolen. She may have thought, “First they kill Him, then they steal His body!”

Jesus came to her as she wept. I think He often does the same with us. We are usually brokenhearted because we do not see the whole picture. We can’t understand what the Master is really doing. We ask “Why?” Why has this loss in our life occurred? Why did God allow such a tragedy in our life? We feel lost and separated from Him; but as we weep He stands beside us and asks us why.

What made Mary aware that it was her Savior? He called her name. He knows your name and calls to you personally. When He speaks our name, we hear the love with which He says it.

Mary wanted to cling to His physical presence. This passage is a mystery to many. The word “hold” can also be translated “cling to”. Jesus would be leaving again, ascending to the right hand of the throne of God. He didn’t want to break Mary’s heart again with His departure. She was already working through the pain of separation, and He didn’t want to take her back to the beginning. She had to let go of His physical presence so that she could receive the Spirit at Pentecost. To help her get the idea of what was to come, He sent her on a mission. That was what she would be doing once the Spirit came, serving her Savior.

Remember: In the midst of the loss that life inevitably brings, remember, He stands beside you, calls your name, and asks, “Why are you crying?” He still has service for you.

**July 12 Morning**

2 Kings 19:1-2 *1 When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the temple of the LORD. 2 He sent Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz.*

The Assyrian captain came to Jerusalem and shouted to all the people his line of propaganda. Basically, he said that the gods of other nations had not been able to deliver them and neither would Jehovah deliver Jerusalem.

When the officials brought the news to Hezekiah, he tore his clothes (a sign of anguish). He put on sackcloth (the rough garment was a sign of self- humiliation). Then he went to the temple of the LORD. In our last devotional we read that Hezekiah was a man who trusted in the LORD. When trouble comes you will turn to the place you really trust, regardless of what you profess.

Though Hezekiah was a righteous king, the LORD had allowed the defeat of many of the fortified cities of Judah. Just because you follow God with all your heart does not mean there will not be defeats and hardship. But we know where to turn. He went to the temple to seek God.

He also sent his whole staff in sackcloth to the prophet Isaiah. The prophet of the Old Testament was the spokesman for God. Hezekiah knew he needed to hear from God. The outcome of his godly response was an angel of God slaying 185,000 of the enemy and sending the remainder back to Assyria where their general was murdered. Archeologists have found evidence that verifies that Jerusalem was the one city that Assyria did not conquer at that time. God is faithful to those who place their trust in Him.

Meditation: Trouble may come our way. We may suffer defeats. But if we humble ourselves and place our hope in God, we will ultimately prevail in spite of the odds.

**July 12 Evening**

John 20:21-23 *21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*

When Jesus appeared to His disciples, He said, “Peace be with you!” They probably needed to hear those words, since the man who said this to them had been murdered a few days earlier. Then, in our passage today, He said it a second time.

The resurrection is cause for us to have peace, peace with God, peace within our hearts and minds.

The next words from His lips would seem to cause anything but peace, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” How can you have peace when you know you are going out into a world that will hate your message? Read on.

“Receive the Holy Spirit.” The Greek word for “spirit,” “breath,” and “wind” is *pneuma.* Remember, the Spirit is not yet in them, but is with them (John 14:17). If they receive His work upon them they will be at peace in a world of tribulation. In a short time, He will be living in and through them. That is where real peace is found for peace is a fruit of the Spirit.

As they went out into the world, Jesus had given them an extraordinary right. He had granted them the same authority with which He forgave sins. This was one thing that upset the Pharisees (Mark 2:8-11; Matthew 9:68). How can God give such authority to men? Those men are men who have received the Spirit of God and walk as Jesus walked. They have the discernment of the Spirit to know who is genuinely repentant and who is not. If you are a person who has received the Spirit, are you letting Him do this work through you? As His instruments in the world, we need to be aware of this authority and exercise it at His instruction.

Remember: As the Father sent Jesus into the world, Jesus now sends you.

**July 13 Morning**

2 Kings 20:1-3 *1 In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover." 2 Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, 3 "Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.*

Hezekiah had been faithful to God throughout his reign. Perhaps it was because of this that the LORD warned him of the time of his death through the prophet Isaiah. When he heard the news, he immediately went to prayer, weeping and pleading with God. He based his plea on his life of walking faithfully before God, his wholehearted devotion, and doing what was good in God’s eyes.

How many of us could pray that prayer? In a way, all of us who are in Christ can indeed pray that. In Him, we have the righteousness of God. I do believe that a submitted life carries weight before the Throne. James reminded us that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. A righteous man prays God’s will.

The Lord heard Hezekiah and sent Isaiah back to give him a cure and a promise of 15 more years. Hezekiah needed assurance that the word was from God. Isaiah prayed and asked God to make the shadow of the sun go backward ten steps. It did!

Recently I have heard of three people who have been given notice that they will soon die. One has accepted it with peace. The others believe they are to pray like Hezekiah and expect a miracle. Is our faith bolstered in either case by our obedient walk as in the case of Hezekiah?

Challenge: Walk faithfully before the LORD in wholehearted devotion doing what is right in His eyes.

**July 13 Evening**

John 20:27-29 *27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." 28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

Thomas wasn’t with the disciples the first time Jesus appeared to them. Even after hearing the others’ testimony, he refused to believe. He told them, *"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."* John 20:25 What was wrong with Thomas? I think it was the same thing that was wrong with the disciples before Jesus appeared. He didn’t want his heart to hope again, only to find it not true. Jesus understands our fragile hearts. Thomas once encouraged the disciples to go and die with Jesus. Now he needs encouragement to even believe their testimony.

When Jesus appeared, He showed that He knew Thomas’ every word. “Go ahead; do it. Touch the wounds. Quit doubting and believe!” Thomas made a confession that none of the others had made to this point. “My Lord and My God.”

He was saying, “Not only are You my master, but you are my God.” He gives us the evidence we need. What we do with it then is up to our will. Thomas took it all the way to India and died a martyr. To this day, the most common male name in Southern India is Thomas.

Jesus told him that those who believe without seeing are blessed. God is pleased with faith. Faith is believing the unseen. You and I have never seen Jesus with our eyes, and yet He has shown many of us in ways that require less faith than others. If you are struggling to find faith, believe the testimony of so many others without seeing. That faith will bring a blessing with it. But if you cannot find the faith to believe, tell Him about it. If you are honest and sincere, He will meet you in a way that will help you come to faith. He will give you a heart that dares to hope.

Consider: God will give you whatever it will take for you to believe. What will you do with it when He does?

**July 14 Morning**

2 Kings 22:19-20 *19 Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD. 20 Therefore I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place.'" So they took her answer back to the king.*

Hezekiah’s son, Manasseh, reigned for 55 years. The worst king of Judah followed the best. His was the longest reign and the wickedest. He put idols in the Temple and offered his sons as burnt sacrifices. He restored all the idolatry his father had destroyed. Manasseh’s son, Amon, was just like his father. His officials assassinated him.

Finally the kingdom returned to a man with a heart like David’s. Josiah was only eight when he began to reign. He ordered the restoration of the Temple. People with a heart after God are concerned about the worship of God in their nation. During the restoration of the Temple, the Book of the Law was found. When it was read to Josiah, he tore his robes and repented before God. He feared the wrath of God that would come upon them because of what his father and grandfather had done. He sent to inquire of a prophetess, and she gave him the answer that is the text for today.

Is your heart responsive to the Word like Josiah’s was? Do you humble yourself before the LORD, realizing that it is only His grace that saves us from wrath? If so, you can expect the LORD to be as gracious to you. If not, God will do whatever it takes to turn your heart toward Him. His wrath is His mercy to turn us back to the place that is best for our eternal good and His eternal glory.

Consider: Is my heart open to conviction by the Word of God?

**July 14 Evening**

John 21:15-17 *15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said,*

*"you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." 16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." 17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.*

When Jesus called Peter from his life of fishing, He caused the disciples to obtain a miraculous catch of fish. Peter realized he was in the presence of a holy man and asked Jesus to go away from him. Peter was convicted. Instead of leaving, Jesus called Peter to be His disciple.

After the resurrection, Jesus told the disciples to wait in Galilee. While they were waiting, Peter took the boat out to fish. Jesus performed a repeat of that miracle when He called Peter to discipleship. Perhaps He was reminding Peter of His original commitment. Though Jesus was no longer daily walking with them, Peter could still follow Him daily.

After they ate the breakfast that Jesus had prepared for them, He asked Peter if he loved Him more than these. What did Jesus mean by “these?” Perhaps He meant the boat and nets and catches of fish, the life of a fisherman. Peter may have been considering going back to his old life. That would be much simpler than the road of discipleship.

Perhaps by “these” Jesus meant the other disciples. Remember that at one time Peter had boldly declared that even if everyone else deserted Jesus, he would never do so. I prefer this meaning. Peter’s cockiness is brought to a realization that he can no longer make comparisons. In the end, he must simply say, *“You know all things; you know that I love you.”* If you have love for me, then take care of and feed my sheep. That was His call. He was no longer a fisherman of fish. He was a witness of the words, miracles, and resurrection of Jesus. God’s sheep needed Peter to feed them with those truths.

Meditation: If Jesus asked you, “Do your love me?” what would be your response?

**July 15 Morning**

2 Kings 23:3 *3The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD--to follow the LORD and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.*

When Josiah heard the words read to him from the Book of the Law, he was responsive and humbled himself. He gathered the elders of Israel and the people of Jerusalem and read to them the words of the covenant. When something from God’s word has gripped our hearts, we should share it with others and not keep it to ourselves.

Then Josiah took the first step. He renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD. He didn’t miss the words “with all your heart and soul.” He was pledging himself to be the servant of God and to live in complete obedience to every requirement the LORD had given Israel. Once he did, the people followed, pledging themselves too. When someone stands up and does what is right in a world engulfed in compromise, it can have a great effect on all who see them. It touched the heart of the nation and gave them one last great revival.

It was too late to save the nation though. The sins of the kings before Josiah had to be accounted for. There was too much evil sown in the land and in the hearts and minds of the nation. Judgment had to come as God had promised. Was the revival in vain? Sin causes havoc in the present life and judgment in the life to come. All that turned from idolatry were spared from the consequences of the sins they would have committed. Revival is never in vain, even though judgment must still come. It gave people one more chance to turn to God before it arrived.

Consider: It is never too late for you to set an example for others to follow.

**July 15 Evening**

Acts 1:3, 7-8 *3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.*

*7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

Jesus didn’t leave them questioning whether or not His resurrection truly happened. He gave many convincing proofs. None of the over 500 people who saw Him questioned the fact that He had risen from the dead. We don’t have any of the words about the kingdom of God that He spoke to them during that time, but we can be sure it was similar to what He had already taught them before His death. Death would profoundly alter the way we see things, but that is not true for the Son of God. He never changes.

When someone we love passes, we treasure the last words they spoke to us. Verses 7 and 8 were Jesus’ famous last words before His ascension. The last question the disciples asked was about the time for the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. Jesus did not say that would never happen. He told them that it was not for them to know the times or dates the Father has set. By this statement we can learn much. All our guessing and predicting is a waste of time and contrary to Jesus’ instruction. The time is set already. The Sovereign God of all has determined the perfect time.

In the meantime, verse 8 is our call to arms. We must be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Then we are to be witnesses of Christ from our homes to the ends of the earth. The word for “witness” in Greek is the word from which we derive our word martyr. It was used in the legal, historical, and ethical sense. Those to whom Jesus was speaking were to tell of the historical facts of what He said and did so that we would have a record. Today we can still share those facts with those who have never heard. A witness tells of Jesus’ legal right to free us from the slavery of sin. Ethically, the apostles and all believers are to demonstrate the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Consider: Have you received the power to be a witness?

**July 16 Morning**

2 Kings 25:19-21 *19 Of those still in the city, he took the officer in charge of the fighting men and five royal advisers. He also took the secretary who was chief officer in charge of conscripting the people of the land and sixty of his men who were found in the city. 20 Nebuzaradan the commander took them all and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. 21 There at Riblah, in the land of Hamath, the king had them executed. So Judah went into captivity, away from her land.*

All the kings who came after Josiah were ungodly. The Pharaoh of Egypt put Josiah’s son in chains after his three-month reign. Each successive king paid tribute to Egypt, and the last king paid tribute to Babylon. The final king was Zedekiah. He rebelled against Babylon but was captured. His sons were murdered before his eyes.

Then his eyes were put out.

The buildings of Jerusalem were burned and pulled down. The Temple was completely looted before it, too, was torn down. That was the sad end Israel. 2 ings 24:3,4 tells us that God was unwilling to forgive the land because of the idolatry and murders committed by King Manasseh. His legacy had so infected the nation that even the reforms of Josiah could not purge it.

Our passage today tells of the final destruction of what was left in Jerusalem. We are all like the nation of Israel. There is a call on our lives to live as an example of our God. Our life is to be a witness to the world. We are enticed along the way to do evil, to turn to other things besides the LORD for our pleasure. At times, we are like David, Hezekiah, and Josiah, the good kings. At other times we are enticed to go the way of Manasseh. Like Israel, we have choices that affect our destiny. Will we be as stubborn as they were and go our own way, so that, in the end, the justice of God must remove us? Or will we be what God has called us to be, examples of His truth, so that His blessings can overflow from our lives to the world? We are each a little king. Many lives are affected by our commitment or lack thereof. Serve the LORD with your whole heart!

Consider: What kind of a record would be left of my life if I died today?

**July 16 Evening**

Acts 2:37-39 *37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all*

*whom the Lord our God will call."*

One hundred and twenty of the followers of Jesus had gathered to wait and pray for the power Jesus had promised. The Spirit was poured out, and they were all filled with Him. They supernaturally spoke the languages of the people that were gathered for the Jewish Feast of Pentecost. Peter preached the first sermon of the newly born church of Jesus Christ. Thousands of people were convicted of their sin of having Jesus executed. They asked the disciples what they should do?

Preaching today should be no different than that first sermon. It should be given in the power of the Spirit. It should convict of sin. It should cause the hearers to ask what God wants them to do. The disciples told the people to repent and be baptized. In other words, have a complete change of mind and attitude, and give yourself to a new master, Jesus the Messiah.

Baptism was not only a declaration that you were beginning a new direction in life, but it also declared you were submitting yourself to a new master. The crowd was promised that if they did this, they too would receive the Holy Spirit.

In the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter preached a message that he did not fully understand. Though he said the promise was for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call. He interpreted it as meaning for the scattered Jews. God would have to speak to him later in this book of Acts to help him understand more fully what he had preached.

Servant of God, the power to change lives is the presence and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Peter’s message bore fruit, not because of Peter’s wisdom or oratory skill, but because the Spirit had indwelt Him and was given the freedom to work through Him.

Consider: Whatever your ministry, if it is going to bear fruit, the same must be true for you.

**July 17 Morning**

1 Chronicles 4:9-10 *9 Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, "I gave birth to him in pain." 10 Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." And God granted his request.*

A book on this passage became a best seller. The author aptly describes all the implications of this passage, of which I will try to make a brief summary. Jabez means pain. Imagine having a name like that! A name was often an indication of destiny. Jabez refused to accept the destiny handed to him in his name. Instead of yielding to what was handed him, he stood as a man more honorable than his brothers. He held himself to a higher standard.

Reaction to difficulty will make or break a person. If you see it as an excuse to justify self and compromise, it will cripple you. If you see it as a reason to strive to an even greater extent, it can be your prodding to a life above the norm. Jabez chose the latter. He asked God to change his destiny. He asked for the blessing of God to be on his life and for his territory to be enlarged. Territory implied the space of his influence. We need to ask God to increase our ministry for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Do you desire to be even more effective?

He recognized the need for God’s hand to be with him. Then he asked for God to break that destiny that his name held him to. He asked for God to keep him from harm so that he would be free of pain. God granted his request.

Consider: Do you feel trapped by expectations others have placed on you, or your environment, or abilities? If you are asking in line with God’s will, He will help you break those boundaries and be all He means for you to be.

**July 17 Evening**

Acts 2:42, 46-47 *42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

*46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

The church of Jesus grew and blossomed overnight. The power of the Holy

Spirit, through the message Peter preached, drew thousands to give their lives to Jesus. This short passage tells us what that first year of the church was like. These new believers had come from all over the region to worship at the Jewish Feast of Pentecost. Instead of returning to their homes, they stayed in Jerusalem to learn from the apostles the things that Jesus had taught and done. That is what we do today as we read the Gospels. Because they were away from their homes, everyone shared their possessions and homes as needed so that all could stay and be instructed.

We can see a number of elements that should be a part of any healthy Christian’s life today. There is the devotion to learning about Jesus, fellowship with other believers, communion, and prayer. There were too many to meet anywhere but in the Jewish Temple. It would be centuries before Christian churches were built. They shared meals with glad and sincere hearts. They spent time praising God. They had a good reputation as they walked in the fruits of the Spirit. Then we have that beautiful last line. The Lord added daily to their group. Every day people came to saving faith in Jesus.

I didn’t read about any witnessing program. It was simply the life of these new converts, their joy, and their example that drew others. Surely when people asked them, they told of how Jesus was transforming them personally. Who added? The Lord did! It was not human effort. Perhaps if we have all the wonderful elements of that early church, we, too, will see the Lord add to our numbers those who are being saved.

Consider: Are you experiencing all the elements of that early church? What can you do to add them to your spiritual life?

**July 18 Morning**

1 Chronicles 5:1 *1 The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (he was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's marriage bed, his rights as firstborn were given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel; so he could not be listed in the genealogical record in accordance with his birthright, …*

In Israel, the firstborn had a double the inheritance of the other heirs. They also had the responsibilities to lead the clan and provide for the women without husbands. They represented the clan and made decisions as head. Reuben was born into this position, but yielding to temptation caused him to lose it. It was a passing momentary pleasure, one large spot on the life of an otherwise faithful son. He was the one that wanted to spare Joseph.

There are times when we face difficult temptations and wonder if there is some way we can indulge without having to pay a price. Sin always takes you further than you want to go and costs you more than you want to pay. God’s grace may free you from some of the consequences or He may not. Sin always exaggerates the potential pleasure as it blinds you to the potential price you will end up paying.

On the other hand, Joseph stood strong in the face of temptation. He refused to yield to the enticements of Potiphar’s wife. It was one step on his way to a position he only dreamed of. Obedience to God reaped rewards he could not have seen except by the revelation of God. If that were not enough, he was given the position and rights of firstborn. Obedience takes the faithful where they can be most effective and rewards them beyond their dreams. It seems like a simple choice to make, but we need God’s help to make it on a daily basis.

Consider: Am I making choices obedient to the Spirit of God today?

**July 18 Evening**

Acts 4:11-13 *11 He is "'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone'. 12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." 13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*

Peter and John saw a crippled man begging at the Temple. Peter told him that he had no money to give him, but what he did have was healing in Jesus’ name. He took the man by the hand and lifted him to his feet. The man ran around jumping up and down praising God. That drew quite a crowd and raised a commotion. The religious leaders kept Peter and John confined overnight. The next day they brought them out for questioning. When asked about the miracle, Peter, the same man that once denied he knew Jesus, boldly declared that it was through faith in the name of the man the religious leaders had murdered that the cripple could walk. He quoted Scriptures to back up his declaration.

Then he made a very bold statement. Salvation from sin is found in no one else. Jesus’ name is the only one that God has given to provide salvation. It is only through the authority granted to Jesus that anyone might be saved. There is one way, not many. Jesus was very clear in saying that He is the way to the Father. He declared that He is the gate through which all men must go.

Galileans like Peter were not known for their schooling. They were more famous for acts of violence. When the religious leaders saw that Peter and John were speaking with great boldness and eloquence, they wondered about the influence Jesus had on their lives. They did not realize it was Jesus speaking through them by the power of the Holy Spirit. Brother or sister, it does not matter what your background is. Jesus can give you boldness to say what needs to be said in any situation. Peter knew his words would be insufficient. He let the Holy Spirit answer their question. The bold convicting answer sounded just like His Savior, because it was.

Consider: Are you relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to speak through you?

**July 19 Morning**

1 Chronicles 11:9 *9 And David became more and more powerful, because the LORD Almighty was with him*.

In this summary of the reign of David, we are reminded why he continually increased in power. The LORD Almighty was with him. God is all-powerful, and all power comes from Him and returns to Him. Several other passages in Scripture remind us of this spiritual truth. When God is with you, there is increase. Psalms 84:7 *7 They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in*

*Zion*. 2 Corinthians 3:18 *18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit*.

The increase in your life will not be in the ways the world counts increase. David’s increase in strength was influence for the Kingdom of God. We find much of our musical heritage goes back to David and his instruments and positions he appointed at the Tent of worship. The Psalms of David have inspired and comforted millions. The world can’t see an increase in glory, but your brothers and sisters in the LORD can. This increase is an increase in eternal substance, not in temporal passing things. It is the most valuable type of increase, for it is eternal.

We run after all kinds of other increase in the world, but the heart that is after God will seek the increase that comes from the presence of the LORD Almighty.

Consider: Is that the kind of increase you are seeking? It is the only kind worth seeking.

**July 19 Evening**

Acts 4:29-31 *29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." 31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.*

Peter and John were warned by the hardhearted religious leaders not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Peter’s bold response was that they had to obey God. When they gathered with the other believers, they reported what the religious leaders had told them.

They lifted their voices together in prayer and asked God to consider the threats against them. They asked for great boldness to continue in the face of those threats. Jesus’ last words had sent them out into the world to teach and preach the good news. They asked for healings, signs and wonders to be performed through the name of Jesus to fulfill Jesus’ instructions.

After the prayer, their meeting place was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The fear was gone. They spoke boldly. These were some of the same people that were filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. We see that God can refill us when we face fear or feel defeated. They recognized the need for the empowerment to continue in the face of threats and prayed according to the will of God. God answers that kind of prayer.

Is something keeping your from obeying Jesus? Have threats or discouragement or even defeat robbed you of that fullness you once had? Ask again! Ask in His name and for His sake, and expect God to answer.

Remember: He pours the Holy Spirit out and fills us up when we ask according to His will, in obedience to His word.

**July 20 Morning**

1 Chronicles 11:10-11 *10 These were the chiefs of David's mighty men--they, together with all Israel, gave his kingship strong support to extend it over the whole land, as the LORD had promised-- 11 this is the list of David's mighty men: Jashobeam, a Hacmonite, was chief of the officers; he raised his spear against three hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter.*

David had a very large following of mighty men. These men began gathering around David when he fled from Saul. Why did they come to him? He had nothing to offer them. They were a bit like the old gangs that people paid protection money to, only they actually did protect people. In the account of their protection of Nabal, David could say that they took nothing from him. They may have been men of ill repute but they were willing to follow David’s example. Surely David shared with them his love for God. If nothing else, they learned of it in his psalms, many of which David wrote while on the run from Saul.

I think there was another thing that drew them. David was anointed. The presence of God was with him. In his words and actions, there was something different, something of God. When a man or woman commits himself or herself completely to God, there is a fire of dedication that draws people. People come to watch them burn while wondering if they can have such a zeal for God. The mighty men of David followed David’s example of standing by faith in the power of God against impossible enemies. Their faith was strengthened by his example, and they had a testimony all their own.

Your faith can be contagious and inspire others to trust in God. Nothing short of complete dedication is going to catch the attention of others. Extraordinary faith comes from an extraordinary relationship. We see David’s extraordinary relationship with God in the psalms.

Prayer: Lord, help me live in that kind of extraordinary relationship with You.

**July 20 Evening**

Acts 6:2-4 *2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."*

God granted the apostles power to perform miraculous signs and healings to attest to the validity of their message that Jesus was the Messiah. The surrounding towns would bring the sick to Jerusalem for healing. Even the shadow of Peter passing over a person would heal them (5:15). People were believing and joining on a daily basis. Because of the power of God that was manifested, those who did not desire to become a part of this new group feared and respected them.

Sharing what they possessed meant that someone had to distribute the resources to those in need. A complaint arose that Hebrew widows were preferred over the Grecian widows in the distribution of food. The Twelve then made a decision to have people selected to do that work, men full of the Spirit and wisdom. I seriously doubt that the Twelve had any intentions of short-changing the Grecian widows. Most spats in the church come from misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Instead of defending themselves and being offended, the Twelve turned the work over to whomever the people chose. In doing so they established a new office in the church, deacons. Deacon literally means one that serves tables. It expanded to all physical matters, but the intent is to leave the pastor/teachers free to stay in prayer and the ministry of the word. It did not indicate that they are any less spiritual, simply that they had a different function in the body. The only two requirements were that they be full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit. Does your fellowship have those that take care of the physical so that your spiritual leadership can focus on the Word and prayer? If you are a spiritual leader, are you trying to do it all?

Remember: Let everyone find their calling and function so that the body will be healthy.

**July 21 Morning**

1 Chronicles 11:17-19 *17 David longed for water and said, "Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!" 18 So the Three broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem and carried it back to David. But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the LORD. 19 "God forbid that I should do this!" he said. "Should I drink the blood of these men who went at the risk of their lives?" Because they risked their lives to bring it back, David would not drink it. Such were the exploits of the three mighty men*.

David’s mighty men were so committed to him because of the Spirit they saw upon him (see yesterday’s devotion) that an expressed desire caused them to risk their lives. Not every desire of an anointed leader is from the Lord. Leaders who have such loyal men must be very careful in what they say to those who support them in ministry.

David longed for a drink from the well in Jerusalem. These three mighty warriors decided they would battle their way to the well and back to honor his request. When David received the water, he did something that must have broken their hearts. He poured it out to before the LORD. Then he explained why.

The men had risked their lives for his personal desire. David knew that life was sacred and should only be put on the line for the One who gave life. How could he partake of something those men had risked their lives for? That would cheapen life and put him in the position of God. Later in David’s life, he did cross this boundary for a different desire. This passage shows us that he clearly knew where the line was. Devotion to an anointed leader is a good thing as long as that leader is expressing God’s desires and not his own. We have the Spirit and must discern which is which.

Consider: Can I be as devoted to God’s wishes as these men were to David’s?

**July 21 Evening**

Acts 7:55-56, 60 *55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.*

One of the first deacons was a man named Stephen. He had such a powerful witness that no one could resist the wisdom with which he presented Jesus as the Messiah. That made a group of Jews very angry. They hired some false witnesses to testify against him, accusing him of speaking against the law and the Temple.

Stephen began to recount their history. He reminded them that God had spoken through the prophets saying God did not live in buildings. Then he reminded them that their forefathers had always killed God’s messengers just as they had killed the One that Moses had predicted would come to them.

In a rage, they dragged Stephen out to stone him. Stephen had a vision of Jesus standing to receive him. Jesus is seated at the right hand of God, the place of power and authority. He stands to receive His martyrs, His witnesses. Stephen’s last words were to the One in the vision. He asked that He not hold the sin they were committing against them. That is what Jesus had requested of the Father on the cross. The first of many martyrs for the cause of Christ fell asleep, the Lord sparing his body the pain of the rocks that were to pummel his body.

Stephen had the boldness that the apostles prayed for. He did not back down when threatened, but used it as an opportunity to speak the truth. We need such an example today. Many we meet are living in careless disregard for the God that made them. They ignore His sacrifice as if it were nothing. Someone needs to tell them. We need the boldness that Stephen had to speak the truth in love. His words fell on the ears of Saul, who would later become the apostle to the Gentiles.

Remember: If we will boldly speak, God’s word will do the work.

**July 22 Morning**

1 Chronicles 16:8-11 *8 Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. 9 Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. 10 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. 11 Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.*

Chronicles records the story of the ark coming to Jerusalem. The first time they tried to bring it their own way, and Uzzah died. The second time they did it according to the Word of the LORD. There was great rejoicing. David danced so all-out that his wife despised him. Musicians were appointed to play before the ark on a regular basis. David gave gifts of food to everyone. It was truly a festive occasion.

At that time, David committed a psalm to his worship leader, Asaph. He didn’t just give it to him, but committed it to him. Asaph had this Spirit inspired song and was now responsible to see it sung. Is that how we feel about Spirit inspired music? It is committed to our worship leaders so that they see it is sung to the LORD.

In this psalm, David commands us to give thanks to the LORD, to call on His name and to tell the nations what God has done. He is commanding us to send out missionaries. We are to sing to Him! We often sing about Him, telling of His wonderful acts, but we need to sing to Him also. We are to glory in His holy name. His name is the sum of His attributes. Glory in all that God is! If you seek the LORD, your heart should rejoice.

Then David told a lesson that was just reinforced. He sought God when the Philistine army came against Israel. The first time God directed them one way to victory. The second time God directed them in a different way, and they defeated the enemy again. Look to the LORD and His strength; seek His face always. That is something Saul did not do, but David was determined to do.

Consider: Are you as determined as David to rely on God’s strength and to seek His face always?

**July 22 Evening**

Acts 8:14-16 *14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.*

After Stephen was murdered, the Jews that opposed the church began to imprison them. The believers scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, preaching the word as they went. Philip went to a city of Samaria. When the people saw the miracles that God did through him and heard his preaching, they paid close attention to what he said.

The apostles had remained in Jerusalem. On hearing the good news that Samaria was accepting the word of God, they sent Peter and John to help. Philip had preached the good news successfully, but as yet, no one had been filled with the Spirit. Peter and John prayed that they would be filled. They knew how important it was to have the Spirit working through them to produce lasting results. They remembered how Jesus had asked them to wait in Jerusalem until they were filled with the Spirit, who would empower them for ministry. These new converts in Samaria were like the disciples before Pentecost. The believed and were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Yet, they still lacked the power that would enable them to really be a witness of the new life in Christ.

After praying for them, they laid hands on the new converts and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Later in the same chapter, a man wanted to pay them money to receive the Spirit. Obviously they did not lay hands on everyone, or he would not have had to make such an offer. He was rebuked for the very idea that the gift of God can be purchased.

Reader, do you sense the need for the power to be an example of the Christian life. To be a witness not only means to tell others, but to live an example before others. If you are willing to obey, to let Jesus be the Master of your life, ask Him to fill you with His Spirit. He will (Luke 11:13).

Remember: You need His power to be a witness.

**July 23 Morning**

1 Chronicles 17:20 *20 "There is no one like you, O LORD, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears*.

David is told that God is the One who will build a house for David, not David for God. God promised to have David’s descendant reign forever. That descendant is Jesus, the son of David. I doubt David understood all the implications of what God spoke to him. We rarely do. Still, even in our limited and sometimes faulty understanding, we are in awe that the Creator of the universe would bother with us and even honor us so. Perhaps David thought of an earthly dynasty. That would have been wonderful enough. But I don’t think he could have conceived that the Son of God would be born through his line to bring salvation to all mankind.

There is no one like God. He is the only God. He is the only One who could make such an amazing promise and fulfill it in ways beyond David’s comprehension. He is more wonderful than we can perceive. Our understanding of Him is always limited, for He is infinite. Our appreciation will always fall short.

Whatever your situation or need, know that God is more than sufficient. He can work in ways you cannot understand. When Judah went into captivity, they must have wondered what happened to these promises. God was still keeping them.

Consider: In our darkest nights, we can know God is still on the throne of heaven working all things together for our good and His eternal glory.

**July 23 Evening**

Acts 8:26, 30-31 *26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road--the desert road--that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."*

*30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. 31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.*

Philip had great success while preaching in Samaria. Then an angel of the Lord spoke to him, sending him the opposite direction. That is very unique. Philip had been a deacon in Jerusalem. One of the requirements for his assignment was that he was filled with the Spirit. Why did Philip need a special messenger from God? We can only speculate. Sometimes success will deaden our ears from hearing the Spirit direct us in another way. That doesn’t mean that God cannot get through to us. I find it encouraging that God got through to Philip even when he may not have been able to hear the gentle leading of the Spirit.

On the road to which he was sent, he saw a chariot with an Ethiopian convert to Judaism. Running alongside, he heard the man reading from Isaiah 53. Philip knew this passage spoke as clearly as any about the life and work of his Savior, Jesus.

The Ethiopian invited Philip into the chariot to explain it to him.

The Holy Spirit is the great teacher, but He often teaches through people. The

Ethiopian needed a human teacher to explain the truth of the Gospel in that passage. Once he understood, he immediately wanted to be baptized. He had probably experienced a water baptism when he converted to Judaism. Now he recognized that he needed to be baptized again in the name of Jesus. Seeing water along the road, he insisted on being baptized then and there. It is believed that this man was the first to bring Christianity to the African Continent. No wonder it was important for Philip to hear the message to go to that road. Philip then suddenly found himself miles to the north in a largely Gentile city.

Consider: God knows how to get us where we need to be to serve Him.

**July 24 Morning**

1 Chronicles 19:13 *13 Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The LORD will do what is good in his sight."*

After David was established as king, he heard about the death of the king of the Ammonites. He sent a group of Israelites to express sympathy. The new king’s advisors suggested that this display of sympathy was really to spy out the land. They cut off the beard and robes of the ambassadors, a sign of great humiliation in that day, and sent them back. When the Ammonites realized this might cause retaliation they hired the Arameans as mercenaries.

David’s general, Joab, led the troops against them but the two enemy armies were able to set up armies in front and behind Joab. Joab divided his army and put one group to fight in front and the other behind. Whichever group was successful was to turn and help the others. That is when the verse we have today was uttered. The odds did not look good. Joab reminded them they were fighting for the people and the cities of their God. That made it personal for each soldier. It wasn’t just about their own life; it was for their family, too.

We realize our battle affects many more than just us personally. How many fallen had forgotten how their entire family and those of their city are affected by their battle? We do the best we can in the situation God has placed us. We rely on His strength. Then we trust that God will do what is good in His sight. God did help them, and both enemy armies retreated. The LORD did what was good in His sight.

Remember: Don’t forget that your spiritual battle is for your family and your city. Encourage yourself with the fact that if you do your part, the LORD will do what is good in His sight.

**July 24 Evening**

Acts 9:4-6 *4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

This man, Saul, was one of the up and coming leaders of the Jewish people. He could see that this new belief in Jesus as Messiah was drawing many people away from the religion he so cherished. Determined to stop this threat, he obtained letters from the religious leaders authorizing him to hunt down Christians and throw them in jail. Since most of them had left Jerusalem, he decided to follow them to Damascus.

On the road to Damascus, a bright light blinded him. He fell from his horse to the ground and heard the above passage. “Why do you persecute me?” The Lord knows the answer to His own question. It was for Saul’s sake the question was asked. It was one that would take time to truly answer in his heart. Why do we fight for religion, when faith is a relationship with the living God? Perhaps Saul was fighting the words he had heard at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:56). Sometimes the more convicted we become, the harder we resist by fighting God. In this case, the manifestation of Jesus that he was fighting was the body of Christ, the believers. Jesus had ascended, but He said that Saul was persecuting Him.

Christian brother or sister, the Lord identifies Himself with you, just as you should identify yourself with Him. Every disciple that was struck in the face was a strike on the face of Christ, filling up His sufferings. Why do the heathen rage?

“Who are You, Lord?” I think Paul knew, but he had to hear the name of Jesus from Jesus’ own lips. Now his mind can no longer make excuses to fight the words He had heard. Jesus ordered him to Damascus for instructions. After all, Paul referred to Him as “Lord.” Now that Paul had quit resisting, he would begin serving. You have heard too. Is your mind still making excuses, or are you convinced?

Consider: Are you willing to call Him Lord, and receive His instructions?

**July 25 Morning**

1 Chronicles 21:1-3 *1 Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. 2 So David said to Joab and the commanders of the troops, "Go and count the Israelites from Beersheba to Dan. Then report back to me so that I may know how many there are." 3 But Joab replied, "May the LORD multiply his troops a hundred times over. My lord the king, are they not all my lord's subjects? Why does my lord want to do this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?"*

David’s kingdom was established and blessed. His enemies were subdued and paying tribute. When the spiritual enemy could not attack from without, he attacked from within. Satan can inspire men to attack the people of God. When that fails, he will try to corrupt the people of God with ungodly ideas.

What was so evil about numbering the people? David had already learned again and again that the victory was not about superior forces but the blessing and leading of God. Numbering the nation was a way to count on his resources in the event that God was not with them. What does it matter how many men you have prepared for battle if God is not with you? This is contrary to lesson upon lesson that God had shown David. Even Joab, the commander of the army, knew this was a mistake.

Joab got to the point when he said, “May the LORD multiply his troops a hundred times over.” It was not just a census on David’s heart, but able bodied men. He pleaded with the king not to go through with this sin, but the king did not listen.

Consider: Have you experienced a friend or loved one pleading with you not to go through with something because they knew it was not of God, and yet you would not listen? There is always a big price to pay when we do that. Recognize spiritual attacks, and consider the well-meaning advice of godly friends. (continued)

**July 25 Evening**

Acts 10:34-35, 44 *34 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.*

*44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.*

Up to this point in the history of the early church, the Christians were all Jewish or converts to Judaism. To help the church past their misunderstanding, the Lord gave Peter a vision of foods that the Jews considered unclean. He told him to eat them. Peter said he could never do such a thing. The Lord told Peter that what He called clean, Peter should not call common.

In a nearby town, a very sincere Gentile worshiper of God received a vision of an angel telling him to send for Peter. At the same time, the Spirit told Peter to go with the men who were coming to look for him. Peter asked the man why he had called for him. As the man relayed the angelic vision he had seen, Peter began to get the message that God was trying to impress on his heart. You don’t have to be Jewish to trust in the Messiah Jesus for salvation.

As Peter began to share the message that these Gentiles had already heard, the Holy Spirit came upon them. Peter’s company was amazed that the Gentiles were given the gift of the Spirit. This was the first time they had seen Gentiles receive the Spirit. From this point on, the church would begin to see that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

Do you see the Gospel as pertaining to a certain group, color, class or type of people? Many years earlier, when Jesus met the woman at the well, the Samaritans declared Him to be the Savior of the world. It is the same today. Every person, rich or poor, black, yellow, or white, needs the Savior as much as you or me.

Remember: Don’t hesitate to share the wonder of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection with those you come in contact with. Then watch the Spirit do the work in their lives.

**July 26 Morning**

1 Chronicles 21:16-17 *16 David looked up and saw the angel of the LORD standing between heaven and earth, with a drawn sword in his hand extended over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell facedown.17 David said to God, "Was it not I who ordered the fighting men to be counted? I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? O LORD my God, let your hand fall upon me and my family, but do not let this plague remain on your people."*

After David numbered the people of Israel, a sign of his heart turning away from God and toward strength in numbers, the LORD sent his prophet to tell David the nation would suffer for this sin. He had three choices. He had to choose between three years of famine, three months of fleeing before their enemies, or three days of a plague from God. David knew God is more merciful than man. He chose the last option.

The plague swept through Israel killing 70,000 people. When the angel that brought the plague stood over Jerusalem, David could see him. David interceded for the city by pleading that the sword of the angel fall on his own home, since he was the guilty party. God’s judgments are always just Surely the people’s hearts had gone the same direction as David’s, trusting in their numbers instead of the

LORD.

In this plea from David, we see his genuine shepherd’s heart. He would rather take the blow than have it fall on his people. This is the heart of an intercessor that cares enough to place their own life on the line for others. We saw it in Moses, and now in David, and ultimately in Jesus, the Great Shepherd. *Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* John 15:13 (continued)

Consider: Let God increase your love for the people in your life until it becomes like His.

**July 26 Evening**

Acts 13:1-3 *1 In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*

Antioch was one of the first churches to be established after the persecution in Jerusalem. It was here that believers in Christ were first called Christians.

According to Ephesians 4:11, the prophets and teachers were leaders in the church.

They were probably the elders of that congregation.

This is an important passage, because it shows us how they functioned. They gathered together to worship and fast. How many times have you heard of the leaders of a local church or city gather just for that purpose? As they did so, the Holy Spirit gave them instructions. The passage doesn’t say whether it was an audible voice or a still small voice in each of their hearts or a word through one of them that was confirmed in the hearts of the others. It is probably good for us that we don’t know or we would insist that God always work the same way. One thing we do know is that they all heard the same thing.

They were to separate out Barnabas and Saul for a special work. This was their call, to go out on a mission of spreading the Gospel. They didn’t stop their fasting once they had heard, they continued in prayer and fasting and then laid hands on them. They were asking the blessing and anointing of God for the work He had called them to. Once they heard the voice of the Spirit directing them, they didn’t just say goodbye to these brothers. They did their part praying for them to be empowered for their mission. God invites us to participate in His work.

Not many are called in this fashion today. Perhaps if we had more of this type of all-out worship with fasting we would see the Holy Spirit move in ways that we all discern to be the hand of God.

Consider: When was the last time you worshiped God in fasting and prayer?

**July 27 Morning**

1 Chronicles 21:22-24 *22 David said to him, "Let me have the site of your threshing floor so I can build an altar to the LORD, that the plague on the people may be stopped. Sell it to me at the full price." 23 Araunah said to David, "Take it! Let my lord the king do whatever pleases him. Look, I will give the oxen for the burnt offerings, the threshing sledges for the wood, and the wheat for the grain offering. I will give all this." 24 But King David replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the LORD what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing."*

Because of David’s sin in numbering the people (see previous 2 days), he had chosen between three possible curses. He chose three days of plague. When the angel stood over Jerusalem with his sword drawn, David knew he must act. 70,000 had already died. He interceded for the people and asked that the curse fall on him and his family since he had committed the sin. The LORD told David, through the prophet Gad, to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

This was the same place that Abraham had offered Isaac. It is the same ridge upon which the Lamb of God would be offered for the sins of the world. It is where the chaff is blown away, and what is of value remains. For Abraham, the hope in his son was blown away and trust in God remained. For Jesus, the sins of the world were blown away with his blood, and redeemed children of God remained. For David, the guilt was about to be blown away, and a forgiven man would remain. David wanted to purchase the ground upon which to build the altar and later the Temple. Araunah offered to give it to him. You might say he was generous, but remember that he is standing in the shadow of an angel with a sword. David insisted on paying full price. Though Jesus paid our sin debt, it was not as if it is inexpensive. He paid the full price in our place. Offerings cost. It cost God the greatest price that could be paid. When we give to God our own hearts, we, too, should be willing to pay with lives of service.

Consider: Will you sacrifice to God what costs you nothing or will you give Him your all?

**July 27 Evening**

Acts 14:21-23 *21 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. 23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.*

After being stoned and left for dead, Paul got up and went to Derbe. A large number of disciples were won there. What does it mean to win? There is a battle raging over the souls of men. Paul and Barnabas were instruments to win them to the Lord.

After the successful time in Derbe, they went back through the cities they had preached in. They did so to strengthen the disciples and encourage them to remain true to the faith. We need leaders that will do that in our churches. They reminded them that the Christian life is not easy. If we are going to truly change from worldly ways to those of heaven, the Lord will take us through many situations that will stretch our faith. Paul never preached that the Christian life was a bed of roses. What do you expect? Are you by faith determined to endure what will inevitably come your way?

As they went through the towns where they had started churches, they appointed elders in each church. Notice the wording is more than one elder in every church. There is no single leader, but a group of men that are recognized to meet the qualifications of Titus 1 and 1Timothy 3. That sounds like the group in Acts 13 that sent Paul and Barnabas out. These men pray together and seek God’s will for leading the local church. There was no hierarchy that they were to submit to. That would not be introduced until well into the second century. With prayer and fasting, they were committed to the head of the body, Jesus. That is where the trust of Paul and Barnabas and these new elders was placed. They would trust the Lord to speak to the elders so that they could feed and lead these new churches. We have come so far from the simple structure of the early church.

Consider: How can we return in spirit if not in letter?

**July 28 Morning**

1 Chronicles 22:5,14 5*David said, "My son Solomon is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the LORD should be of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all the nations. Therefore I will make preparations for it." So David made extensive preparations before his death.*

*14* *"I have taken great pains to provide for the temple of the LORD a hundred thousand talents of gold, a million talents of silver, quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed, and wood and stone. And you may add to them*.

Before David’s death he had one great vision. He wanted to prepare everything for a house of God, the Temple. The tabernacle (tent of meeting) had served the purpose of a place to meet and worship up until this time. Now that they had settled and defeated their enemies, a fixed place could be constructed. David was not allowed to build it because of all the blood he had shed in battle. The house of the LORD was to be a place of peace. But David didn’t just leave it all up to his son, Solomon. He did all that he could to amass the materials and laborers and create the plans.

The record of the amount of materials collected is staggering! David gave it his all. In life, we will have God given desires that we cannot work directly on. That does not mean we cannot give and help in many ways. David appointed singers, made instruments, wrote psalms, appointed construction workers, imported materials and many other things that became a part of the Temple, even though he would never see it. Most of the fruit from a surrendered life will not be seen in our lifetime. Only the view from eternity will tell the real tale of our life’s investment in the things of God.

David invited his son to add even more. He was not making a monument to self. He wanted the very best for the worship of God, and the more added the better. He encouraged others to give to the great cause. Though that building was temporal, it was a picture of an eternal one.

Consider: How much more zealous should we be to see the temple of living stones built!

**July 28 Evening**

Acts 15:1-2, 28 *1 Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.*

*28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements:*

Some of the group of the Pharisees had come to believe in Jesus as Messiah.

They brought with them their intense desire to see that everyone obeyed the laws of Moses. When some of them visited Antioch, where a number of Gentile believers worshiped, they insisted that they learn all the details of the law. They even taught that unless they keep the law, they could not be saved.

At that point, Paul and Barnabas began to debate with them. They had seen the Spirit of God poured out on people without the obedience to the law. How could they not be saved? The church in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to ask some of the original Apostles and elders about the matter. James, the brother of Jesus, was the spokesman for the Jerusalem group.

After Paul and Barnabas presented the issue, there was much debate. Finally, reminding them of Peter’s testimony of the Gentiles that received the Holy Spirit, James made what seemed to be a consensus decision. Their letter to Gentile believers stated, *“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us…”* This was the first of many church council meetings over the centuries to decide on matters of doctrine. They reached a consensus decision with the help of the Holy Spirit and had a witness in their hearts of His will. Here is our Biblical way of dealing with “sharp debate” that arises in the church.

They asked the believers to keep the barest essentials of Jewish law so as not to offend the Jewish people. That was not required for their salvation, but merely to keep from offending others.

Consider: The true spirit of Christianity is to give up our rights and freedoms so as not to offend others. Then we may have the opportunity to share Jesus with them.

**July 29 Morning**

1 Chronicles 22:19 *19 Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the LORD your God. Begin to build the sanctuary of the LORD God, so that you may bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD and the sacred articles belonging to God into the temple that will be built for the Name of the LORD."*

David had prepared the way for Solomon to reign in several ways. He had subdued the enemies of Israel. He asked the leaders to assist Solomon, and as we saw yesterday, he prepared everything for the building of the Temple. There was one last thing Solomon needed. David gave him the single most important thing he needed to reign, the instruction to devote his heart and soul to seeking the LORD.

Unless that was done, all the other preparation would not help him.

If our heart’s great desire is to know the LORD and His will, it is devoted to seeking the LORD. That only comes about when we value the things of God more highly than the things of the world. It is always an exercise in faith, for it is the desire for the unseen over the visible. David asked Solomon to set his compass toward the LORD.

The second great burden on David’s heart was to see the Temple built, so he charged Solomon to get started. Once the Temple was built, the Ark of the Covenant could be placed along with the sacred articles. The presence of God would fill the place, and the people’s hearts would turn toward the LORD.

Every group of worshipers needs the same thing. They need leadership who have devoted their hearts to seeking the LORD. Since they are the temple, they need the presence of God in them. They need the tools (gifts and abilities), with which to carry out that which God would direct, to be placed in the hands of those who are directed to use them.

Consider: Are all of those things in place in those with whom you worship? If not how can you work toward that end?

**July 29 Evening**

Acts 16:25-26, 33 *25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken.*

*At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.*

*33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.*

The Holy Spirit guided Paul and Silas by forbidding them to go in certain directions and through a night vision. In Philippi, they found some Jewish women who accepted the Word and believed.

After Paul had cast a spirit of divination out of a young lady, those who had used her to make money stirred up the town against them. They were whipped and thrown into prison. The prisoners must have been amazed to hear these men who had been beaten and sat in stocks singing praise to God. At midnight, an earthquake opened the prison doors and their chains came loose. The guard was about to kill himself. Losing a prisoner meant his life would be forfeit. Paul stopped him by telling him all the prisoners were still there.

Most people would be looking for a way to escape. Paul and Silas were looking for opportunities to share Jesus. The grateful soldier washed their wounds and gathered his family to hear their testimony about Jesus. He and his whole family believed and were baptized before one o’clock in the morning! I don’t think anyone slept that night. Most of us would wonder if God had made a mistake by allowing them to be thrown in prison. Paul and Silas praised God in everything and were given the opportunity to lead this Roman family, and probably many of the prisoners, to Jesus. God planned a midnight earthquake to establish a church in Philippi.

Consider: When circumstance leads you down a road that is not one you would have chosen, look for God to be working something in or through your life. Your importunity is God’s opportunity. Praise Him for it, and watch for His hand.

**July 30 Morning**

1 Chronicles 28:12, 19 *12 He gave him the plans of all that the Spirit had put in his mind for the courts of the temple of the LORD and all the surrounding rooms, for the treasuries of the temple of God and for the treasuries for the dedicated things…19 "All this," David said, "I have in writing from the hand of the LORD upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan."*

There is a tendency to think God was more visible and directly involved in the Old Testament in more dramatic ways than in this age. As David was sharing the plans of the Temple with Solomon, he told how he received the inspiration for the plan. He did not have a vision or experience some kind of autonomic writing. He did not have a vivid dream or spirit travel to heaven. The Spirit of God put it in his mind. The hand of the LORD was upon him and gave him understanding of the details of the plan.

The LORD often works with us in the same way. If (and that is a great big IF) we are seeking Him and His will with all our heart and have been walking with Him for some time to learn discernment, the Spirit inspires our thoughts. As we walk with the hand of the LORD upon us, we will discern Spirit inspired thoughts.

Thoughts come from one of three sources: attacks of the enemy, our own soul, or the Spirit of God. As we mature we learn to discern the difference and become more and more attentive and obedient to the Spirit inspired thoughts and quick to reject the enemy’s temptations. When we pray we will notice the thoughts for whom to pray for enter our mind. As we approach daily difficulties, we will notice solutions that we would never have come up with on our own. Be careful to give God all the credit and the glory for those. That is what David was doing when he said, *“He gave me understanding in all the details of the plan*.” “I can’t take credit for one little detail. God inspired my thoughts.” We find the same experience today as we go about working on the temple with living stones.

Remember: Grab those God inspired thoughts and give Him all the glory when you see the good fruit.

**July 30 Evening**

Acts 17:2-4, 11 *2 As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said. 4 Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.*

*11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

Paul usually began working in a city from the Jewish synagogue. It was a place where he could speak to people with some background in prophecies about the Messiah. His approach was to show the people that the prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. He explained that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. To explain why Jesus had to suffer is to explain His sacrifice in our place.

Seeing that the prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus, some of the Jews were persuaded, along with a large number of God-fearing Greeks. Even in those early days, women seem to have more readily accepted the Gospel. The Jews who did not accept Paul’s teaching were jealous of them winning the crowds. They stirred up a riot, and Paul and Silas had to leave.

The next town, Berea, met the message with a more noble character. Instead of emotion and competition, they searched the Scriptures every day to see if Paul and Silas were speaking the truth. The church today has the same response to teaching. Some just get upset and boot the new speaker, in spite of the new people coming into fellowship. They are jealous of a loss of power. Others search the Scriptures to see if the new speaker is teaching Scriptural truth.

Consider: When you hear a message that teaches something unfamiliar to you, do you act like a Thessalonican or a Berean?

**July 31 Morning**

1 Chronicles 29:1 *1Then King David said to the whole assembly: "My son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced. The task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the LORD God.*

David gave, and then he gave some more. The tonnage of precious metals is incredible! And when David asked, *“Now, who is willing to consecrate himself today to the LORD?"* 1 Chronicles 29:5, the leaders also gave in abundance. *The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly.* 1Chronicles 29:9 Everyone seemed to be totally devoted to making the house of the LORD the most amazing and costly structure ever built*.*

This passage is a favorite of those raising funds to build new church buildings. Let us never forget that we are speaking of people, living stones, who make up the temple today. The Temple Solomon built was a wonderful, a God inspired illustration of what God desires. David referred to it as God’s footstool. The prophet said that heaven is God’s throne and earth His footstool so what kind of house can you build Him? (Acts 7:48) The task is indeed great. In fact, all this gold and silver and precious stones, all the labor of gifted and anointed men could only erect a shadow of the real temple.

The task is great, but now we have the Son of David (Jesus) to do the building. Unlike Solomon, the Son of David is experienced. Will we give of ourselves and our resources to see that the real temple of living stones is built, like they gave to see a passing shadow built? How much more should we be willing to give our treasures and talents to the real thing!

Consider: There is surely someone in your life that the Master Builder is transforming into a living stone. How can you give to see the work is completed?

**July 31 Evening**

Acts 17:26-28 *26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'*’

While Paul was preaching in Berea, the Jews again stirred up opposition toward him. The brothers escorted him from there to Athens. Paul was disturbed at all the idolatry he saw there and began using every opportunity to speak about Jesus. When we see problems in our world, do we look for opportunities to share the answer we have found?

The philosophers of Athens invited Paul to address them. The Holy Spirit spoke through Paul in a way that these Greeks could relate. He even used quotes that they knew and accepted from some of their own writers. In every culture, we can find some truth from which we can connect with the local people.

Paul declared that God was sovereign over all things. He even determines where each of us will live and the age in which we will live. The reason He plans things out with such detail is so that men will seek Him. God has arranged our lives to give us the most opportunity to come to know Him. He is not aloof or distant or uncaring. He is doing everything possible to reach every individual.

We are surrounded by Him. It is not as if we have to make some great journey or perform some impossible deed. He is continually reaching out to us. Then He explained God’s solution to man’s problem. The judge of the world became a man and rose from the dead. As soon as they heard about resurrection, they were divided. Some responded to God who surrounded and reached out to them. Others kept it as an intellectual game. Our job is to share at the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is up to each individual to make a choice as to whether or not they will respond to the God who is continually reaching out to them.

Consider: Are you responding to the God in Whom you live and move and have your being?

**August 1 Morning**

1 Chronicles 29:14 *14 "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand*.

This final prayer of David reminds us of the Lord’s prayer. It begins acknowledging the greatness of God and praising His attributes. Take time to read the whole prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:10-20. David had given tons of gold and silver and piles of wood. Then the leaders gave in great abundance. They were humbled by how much wealth the LORD had given them. It was only 40 years earlier when the Philistine army was defeating them and taking their lands. Only recently had they survived the coup of Absalom. God had granted them so many blessings that they willingly gave for a house for His name.

David asked in the prayer, *"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this?”* Why is God so gracious? David was not perfect. He sinned greatly, but he repented and was humbled. A fallen and restored man can more quickly acknowledge his unworthiness. The piles of materials dedicated to the Temple reminded them how much God had blessed them in spite of their unworthiness.

Do we realize that all we give back to God is only what He has blessed us with in the first place? Does it humble us and cause us to be in awe of His great goodness when we consider how much we can give? Sadly, it often has the opposite effect of causing us to be boastful. That just shows our ignorance. How can we boast when we are only giving back what has been given to us? David was a humbled man who was still after God’s heart. That is why his attitude and response were in touch with reality.

Consider: Do you acknowledge that all you give came from God in the first place?

**August 1 Evening**

Acts 19:9-11 *9 But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. 10 This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. 11 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul,*

At Ephesus Paul met a small band of disciples who had been baptized by John the Baptist. He preached Christ to them, and they were baptized in Jesus’ name and filled with the Holy Spirit. Then Paul began to speak in the Synagogue. At that time, some referred to faith in Jesus as The Way. When people become abusive, it is often because they refuse to listen, even when they know they are wrong. Because they cannot use reason, they turn to insults.

It seems that it was Paul’s pattern to preach in the local Synagogue until they would hear him no more. Then he would teach in a nearby home those who had come to faith. Though he stayed in this one place for two years teaching, all of Asia heard the Word. The Word transformed them and caused them to be a testimony wherever they went. God had given Paul such a gift of healing that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him brought healing to the sick. This was a sign to the seekers that Paul’s teaching about Jesus was the truth.

We often think of revival as something that is quick. In this case it slowly built up over several years as Paul faithfully taught the Gospel. It is a work of God to bring revival or renewal. It is our job to faithfully proclaim the Gospel and live a life that is an example of it. Wherever you are, don’t be discouraged if things are not happening quickly. Our work is to be faithful to the Holy Spirit. Not everywhere that Paul went experienced renewal like Ephesus. Remember, it was more common for him to be chased out of town.

Consider: Our job is to sow the seed. The results are up to the Lord.

**August 2 Morning**

2 Chronicles 4:1 *1 He made a bronze altar twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide and ten cubits high.*

Solomon made the bronze altar a square of about 30 feet and 15 feet high. The priests had to go up stairs to offer upon this altar. There is no record of the thickness of the brass but it is guessed to be about 3 inches. That would make the weight of this structure over 200 tons! Brass is the metal that symbolizes judgment. Imagine walking into the temple court and seeing this gigantic altar with the smoke ascending as the priests laid out the sacrifices.

The altar Moses had constructed was only a fraction of this size. The nation had grown. With that growth came the need for greater area of sacrifice. With experience of life and testimonies of those who had gone before, one would hope that the people were more faithful to sacrifice in recognition of their need for forgiveness.

This dominant feature of the temple is also the dominant feature in the living temple. The living stones that make up the temple today look out upon our area of worship, and the thing that should fill our view is the cross. Bigger than any other physical thing is the place where judgment was met. It fills our vision. We imagine what is on the other side, but we can’t really see it. All we need to really see is that our sin debt is paid. There is our peace of mind and our release from guilt. Thank God that it looms so large before us.

Some people think there is too much talk of the cross. They think it is too dominant. Imagine the enormous altar Solomon built at the directions the LORD gave to his father David, and think again.

Consider: How important is the cross to you?

**August 2 Evening**

Acts 20:24, 27, 31 *24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace*

*27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears*.

When Paul arrived at Miletus, he sent for the elders (overseers or bishops) of the church at Ephesus. The church had grown so much that he could not address them all, so instead, he spoke to the church leaders. He told them that the Spirit was leading him to Jerusalem but also warning him that it meant hardship. Yet Paul was not worried about his life; he was concerned about finishing the tasks the Lord had given him. That task was telling people about God’s grace. That should be the focus of our message.

Paul didn’t pull punches when it came to speaking the truth about the Word. It often caused him persecution, but he refused to compromise. He would not water down the Gospel to be accepted or safe or advance himself. Repentance and dying daily are not a popular gospel, but it is the true Gospel. Anything short of that is not the whole will of God.

Then Paul warned them about the heresies that were about to enter the church. He told them the source of those teachings would be men who wanted others to follow them personally. Pride has a way of making us think we see something no one else does. It causes us to elevate ourselves above others. Paul had taught faithfully for so long so that they would be grounded in the truth and able to recognize it from a lie. His letters can help us do the same. You can’t sit there at Ephesus under Paul’s teaching, but you can read the letter to the Ephesians and other churches.

Notice that he unceasingly warned them with tears. Paul wasn’t afraid to show emotion. He could foresee wolves coming into the flock. That broke his heart. A teacher who demonstrates genuine love is a powerful influence on the flock.

Consider: What does Paul’s example speak to your heart?

**August 3 Morning**

2 Chronicles 7:11-12 *11 When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the LORD and in his own palace, 12 the LORD appeared to him at night and said: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.*

After Solomon finished praying, fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifices. It was a sign that God was involved in all that was done, and it was acceptable as a shadow of the heavenly temple. The glory of the Lord so filled the Temple that the priests could not minister. Everyone fell on their faces and worshiped with the words they had sung earlier, “He is good; His love endures forever.” Then Solomon sent the people home, and they were full of joy because of all God had done for David and Solomon and for His people. When we know God is at work in our lives for our good, we can be full of joy. When we see He is involved in our leaders’ lives, we can be full of joy for we know they will be leading according to His direction.

Then when all the festivity was over, the LORD appeared to Solomon. He promised that He had heard the prayer of Solomon. He gave Solomon the assurance that his eyes and ears would be open toward prayers prayed in that place. Even today the Jews claim this promise, praying at the Western Wall.

God chose that place for Himself as a temple of sacrifice. Almost 1000 years later, on that same mountain, He would present Himself as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. He had indeed chosen that place as a temple of sacrifice. Sometimes, when the LORD speaks, He has much more in mind than we can fathom. His words are always filled with a depth that is beyond our comprehension. We do as He leads, and then He does the impossible and fills our meager labor with greater importance than we can imagine. Then He says, “Well done”, as if we had a hand in all the greatness He accomplishes. He is good and His love endures forever!

Consider: Your obedience results in more fruit than you can imagine. Praise God!

**August 3 Evening**

Acts 27:23-25 *23 Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me 24 and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' 2[[2]](#footnote-2) So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.*

When Paul returned to Jerusalem, James and the elders encouraged him to go to the Temple with others for rights of purification. They reasoned that this would show the Jewish believers that Paul was one with them in keeping the Law. Some Jews from Asia spotted Paul. Making false claims, they stirred the crowd into a frenzy almost killing him. The Romans came to the rescue. After numerous indecisive trials, Paul appealed to Rome.

On the way to Rome, the ship ran into a fierce storm. Everyone gave up hope of surviving, but Paul had seen a messenger of the Lord. In the morning he gathered them and told them of the visitation. This angel told Him the same thing Jesus had said to the disciples when they thought He was a ghost walking on the lake. “Do not be afraid!” God sees your situation and is there with you.

Paul was told that he had a job yet to do in testifying to Caesar, but He also said that God had graciously given him the lives of all who sailed with him. Paul must have been praying for them. What a testimony he was to the soldiers and other prisoners! Everything he said came to pass. His peace in the storm, his prayers for them, and his testimony on the island surely won a number of them to Jesus. Paul passed on to them what he has obtained from the Lord, courage and faith.

Remember: When we face the inevitable difficulties of life, let us follow this Christ centered example. Pray for others. Hear from the Lord, and pass on the faith and courage that He imparts to you for a testimony to those around you.

**August 4 Morning**

2 Chronicles 12:1, 5 *1 After Rehoboam's position as king was established and he had become strong, he and all Israel with him abandoned the law of the*

LORD… 5 Then the prophet Shemaiah came to Rehoboam and to the leaders of Judah who had assembled in Jerusalem for fear of Shishak, and he said to them, "This is what the LORD says, 'You have abandoned me; therefore, I now abandon you to Shishak.'"

Rehoboam began with greed and immediately lost two-thirds of the nation. That did not humble him. He continued in his pride. After strengthening his army and defenses, he abandoned the law of the LORD. As the leader went, so went the nation. They followed his bad example in forsaking God.

An innumerable army, led by the king of Egypt, came against him and captured all the cities he had fortified and armed. One by one they fell. Then the prophet Shemaiah came and told Rehoboam that since they had abandoned God, God had abandoned them. Since they wanted to proceed without God, God allowed them to. What would our life be like without the protection of the hand of God? When a man or family or nation is walking in the fear of the LORD, they are surrounded by a protecting influence. You will never know all the things the LORD spared you from that the enemy planned against your life. That is why the end of the LORD’s prayer says, “Deliver us from the evil one”(Matthew 6:13).

When we step outside of a trusting dependent relationship with God, that invisible hand of protection is lifted and the enemy is allowed in to bring us to our senses. It worked for Rehoboam. He and his leaders humbled themselves and said, “The LORD is just.” Then God could have mercy on them and allowed Jerusalem to remain, though subjugated. All the treasure amassed in the Temple was carried away by the enemy. Sin has consequences, and though we are allowed to continue and are restored relationally, there is a great loss because of our rebellion.

Consider: Draw near to God now so that He does not have to use tragedy to draw you back.

**August 4 Evening**

Romans 1:16-17 *16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."*

The Apostle Paul lived in a world that was similar to ours. Philosophies and a variety of religious beliefs permeated the Roman world. The preaching of the cross was quite contrary to the religions man had created, but Paul was not ashamed to be different. He did not mind not fitting in, for he knew the power of God that could save anyone who would believe. We need to carry that kind of confident boldness into our world.

Since Paul would later say that God does not respect one person over another, what does this mean that the gospel is to the Jew first? Certainly it is not first in importance. Throughout Scripture we can see that it is God’s order. Even Jesus’ ministry went to the Jew first. Even though God knew that they, as a nation, would reject Him, He still went to them first. It is God’s desire that all receive the salvation He has provided for them, and He knows the best order to make that possible.

Verse 17 is the verse that broke through to Martin Luther’s conscious mind and showed him salvation was not attainable by works. To be justified with God, to be made acceptable in His eyes, can only happen through faith. No amount of good deeds, no particular ritual, simply a heart that places its hope and trust in the God that made us, through the way provided by the cross. Abraham believed God. That belief was credited to him as righteousness. Everyone comes to God the same way, as Martin Luther later summed up, “By grace alone; through faith alone.”

To live by faith includes more than a one-time comprehension of God’s sufficiency. It is a daily reliance on His all-sufficiency. It is a daily dependence on His power, provision, and His life to be what He calls each of us to be.

Consider: Are you living by faith today? Are you trusting more in the unseen than in what you can see?

**August 5 Morning**

2 Chronicles 12:12,14 *12 Because Rehoboam humbled himself, the LORD's anger turned from him, and he was not totally destroyed. Indeed, there was some good in Judah… 14 He did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the LORD.*

We all have an immediate testimony and a life testimony. At this point, near the end of Rehoboam’s life, he had a good testimony. It took being conquered and nearly destroyed to turn him from pride to humility, but at least he turned in the right direction unlike some of the kings that followed him. This was really the spiritual high point of his life. We can only guess what Israel would have been like had he served the LORD all his life, following the example of his grandfather David.

From this point forward, the kings will have one of two epitaphs. They have this one that Rehoboam had of doing evil and not setting his heart on seeking the LORD or one of walking in the path of King David. In the North, they were likened to Jeroboam who led the nation into idolatry. It was black and white. Our overall life’s testimony is good or evil. It has to do with where we have set our heart. Where is your compass pointed? What tower have you leaned your life’s ladder on?

Rehoboam had set his course for greed and self-fulfillment early on and stayed with that coarse almost to the end. Only disaster and the threat of destruction would turn him at the end of his life. What will it take to turn you? If you are set on self and not your Creator, you will have the same epitaph as Rehoboam.

Consider: The sooner you turn and set your heart upon God, the more likely your life’s testimony will be changed.

**August 5 Evening**

Romans 1:18-20 *18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

Paul said God’s wrath is being revealed. It is a present but also progressive revelation. They could see the consequences of sin on the physical and emotional state of those who were given over to it. You can too, if you are discerning. Shortly after Paul died, the Temple was destroyed. That generation of Jews who had rejected the Messiah and persecuted His followers would soon be persecuted by Rome, reaping what they had sown. The wrath of God could be seen in the physical afflictions of the pagan cultures as well. STDs were rampant because of Greek temple prostitution.

Did the Gentile cultures have an excuse for not knowing right from wrong? Paul wrote that what might be known about God was made plain to them. God made it plain. God has revealed to every culture and individual what they need to know about Him. His eternal power and divine nature are clearly seen and understood through His creation. No one has an excuse. As we see that revelation and as the Spirit works on our hearts, we must come to a decision of whether or not to surrender to the God of creation or serve our lusts.

It has been said that God has given us three revelations, creation, the Bible, and the life of Jesus. Certainly the Bible and life of Jesus speak to us more directly, but creation has much to say also. City life today surrounds us with the man-made. Take time to see the beauty of His creation, and let it speak to you of his eternal power and divine attributes.

Consider: Use illustrations from creation to understand life. Jesus did.

**August 6 Morning**

2 Chronicles 13:5 *5 Don't you know that the LORD, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt?*

Abijah inherited the throne of Judah after his father Rehoboam’s death. When war came between the northern tribes of Israel and southern Judah, Abijah found his troops were outnumbered two to one. He climbed a hill and shouted out to the army of Israel the above passage. Little explanation is given in Scripture about the salt covenant, but we can piece together from other texts what it must have meant. When two parties sat down and ate salted bread they entered into a peace agreement. It implied that they were friends and were bound to defend one another. When did David do this with God? It was when he ate the shewbread while fleeing from Saul. God promised to make David king and later promised his descendants would reign. Abijah was reminding Israel that God was on their side because God keeps His word.

He went on to describe how their leader, Jeroboam, had forsaken God and made his own gods. If that weren’t enough to cause them to doubt, he described how you could buy the priesthood with a certain number of sacrifices.

While Abijah was declaring his right to rule, Israel was sending troops behind him. Suddenly Israel attacked from both directions, but the house of Judah had placed their trust in God. When they shouted out their battle cry, God turned the troops of Israel. Abijah’s troops soundly defeated Israel that day, destroying over half their army. In our day, the idea of having God on your side is laughed at. It still makes the difference.

Remember: You can always count on the promises of God.

**August 6 Evening**

Romans 2:28-29 *28 A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 29 No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.*

Paul asks the reader if keeping the rituals has any meaning if you are disobedient to God? What if a person doesn’t keep the rituals but is obedient to God? Isn’t obedience more important than ritual? The Jews had so many rituals and rules that they forgot what they were all about. While looking down on their Gentile neighbors, they were no more obedient to God than those they despised. In fact, some of the Gentiles were more obedient, for they obeyed the law of conscience in their heart.

What makes a man a Jew? Is it merely lineage? Is it the covenant ritual of circumcision? Circumcision was merely a picture of a heart made tender toward God. The one whose heart is made tender by the Holy Spirit is a true child of God. His actions come from the heart, not just intellectual obedience to a set of rules or a formula prayer.

The person with a tender heart toward God does not act for the purpose of men approving his actions as those of a spiritual man. He acts from the heart to please God. Men may despise him, but God is pleased with him. Man may not understand his actions and misinterpret his motives, but God will know. Whether he understands it or not, the cross has made access to God and a new heart possible.

What is the motivating factor for your actions? Do you try to do what is respected so that man will think highly of you, or do you act from a heart that has been made tender toward God?

Prayer: Ask the Spirit to circumcise your heart that you might be sensitive to His leading.

**August 7 Morning**

2 Chronicles 16:7-9 *7 At that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah and said to him: "Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the LORD your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand. 8 Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the LORD, he delivered them into your hand. 9 For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war."*

Asa was one of the good kings of Judah. He restored the Temple and encouraged the nation to return to the worship of Jehovah. While he was earnestly working on the Temple, God gave him peace for ten years. When an enemy finally did come to attack, he relied upon God and completely defeated them. He had set his heart to seek the LORD.

After Asa had reigned 35 years, the king of Israel, Baasha, began to fortify cities along the border. This was indication that he was preparing for war. Instead of seeking God as he had done earlier, he took the treasures from the Temple and bribed the king of Aram to break his treaty with Israel. The tactic was successful in that Baasha gave up his plan to attack Judah. It was not a success in the eyes of God who sent Hanani the seer with these words of instruction. Had Asa forgotten how God helped him when he was small and unsure of himself? God is always searching the earth to find hearts fully committed to Him. Those are the hearts He strengthens.

Sometimes we attain immediate success, but because we did not do things God’s way we end up with long-term problems. Asa later came down with a disease in his feet. He would not seek God for that either, but only sought help from the doctors. That resulted in his death. Asa’s legacy was a good one, but it would have been even better if he had stayed dependent on God.

Consider: As God blesses your life, recognize that strength is from Him. Stay fully dependent on Him.

**August 7 Evening**

Romans 3:22-24 *22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

There is only one way to be made right with God. It is not in being perfect or doing good. His standard is His own perfection. His glorious attributes of goodness, patience, love, peace, and holiness are the standard. Anything short of that is not righteous. The Law of God only taught man that they could not measure up to His standard by keeping it, for no one can keep it perfectly.

But there is a righteousness that comes from God through faith in Jesus Christ. He lived a life that was up to that standard. If you hide yourself in Him, He will be your righteousness. He paid the sin debt you owed, and in place of it credits you with His righteousness. There has never been a more unbalanced exchange. There will never be a more redeeming exchange.

Why would He do such a thing? Included in that glory that we “fall short of” is a most lovely characteristic, grace. He chose to set His love on us. He sees what He can make of us and gives us what we could never deserve from our own efforts. We could never attain to the glory of God, so He made a way for us. What does He see that would cause Him to pay such a price as the cross? He sees His love transforming you into the likeness of His Son. He sees the day when you are living in the glory of God. This is true of everyone who comes to God, Jew or Gentile, before or after Jesus’ death. It was true of Abraham when he believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. It was true of the prostitute who washed Jesus’ feet with her hair, and it is true of you and me today.

Meditation: There has never been a more beautiful word to the human ear than “grace.”

**August 8 Morning**

2 Chronicles 18:19-21 *19 And the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab king of Israel into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?' "One suggested this, and another that. 20 Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the LORD and said, 'I will entice him.' "'By what means?' the LORD asked. 21 "'I will go and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,' he said. "'You will succeed in enticing him,' said the LORD. 'Go and do it.'*

This passage is troublesome to many. God is not a man that He should lie. What is happening here? Ahab was one of the wickedest kings of Israel. His wife, Jezebel, was the wickedest queen. Jehoshaphat had become the king of Judah and was his ally. Though Jehoshaphat was a godly king, he must not have had much discernment. Many prophets declared that Ahab would win the battle, but Jehoshaphat wanted to hear from a prophet of Jehovah. When he was called, he first told him to go and win the battle. When Ahab pressed him for the truth, he told what he saw in the halls of heaven, today’s passage.

God was asking the angels how to get Ahab to go to his doom in a battle against Ramoth-Gilead. The text suggests the angels made suggestions, but all were declined. Finally one spirit said, *"I will go and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets.”*  I believe this was a fallen spirit. They are always seeking to harm mankind. God’s hand of protection holds them back unless it serves His ultimate purpose in which he allows them freedom to act. We see the same kind of scenario in the beginning of Job.

Ahab had Jehoshaphat wear royal robes, and he dressed in normal soldier attire. When the Aramean army went after Jehoshaphat’s chariot, he fled. A stray arrow found the joint in Ahab’s armor and mortally wounded him. You can’t get away from the decrees of God. A fallen spirit and a heathen army were used to bring judgment on the murderer, Ahab. Tomorrow we’ll see how God dealt with Jehoshaphat for befriending Ahab.

Consider: Be sure your sin will find you out (Numbers 32:23).

**August 8 Evening**

Romans 4:19-21 *19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*

The Apostle Paul makes the case that Abraham is the father of all believers, both Jew and Gentile. Since he trusted in the promise of God and was counted as righteous before he received the covenant of circumcision, he is father of those who have not entered into Jewish ritual but still trust in God. His example clearly shows us that it is not by works that we are made right with God, but by believing and trusting in God.

His faith is an example to us all. Even when his body and that of his wife’s were incapable of producing a child, he believed God’s promise that they would have a boy. If God told you that a 100-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman would have a child, would you believe it? Faith believes what cannot be seen or reasoned with the natural mind. Faith pleases God (Hebrews 11:6).

What has God promised to you? He has promised all believers that He will transform them into the likeness of His Son. You may look at your thoughts and actions today and think it is impossible, but God has promised. Won’t you be like Abraham who looked beyond the natural and was fully persuaded that God had the power to do what He promised? Once you are fully persuaded, begin to act by faith on the promise.

Consider: Live in the confidence that what He has begun, He will bring to completion. It will keep you from wallowing in your failures.

**August 9 Morning**

2 Chronicles 19:1-3 *1 When Jehoshaphat king of Judah returned safely to his palace in Jerusalem, 2 Jehu the seer, the son of Hanani, went out to meet him and said to the king, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, the wrath of the LORD is upon you. 3 There is, however, some good in you, for you have rid the land of the Asherah poles and have set your heart on seeking God."*

In yesterday’s devotion, Jehoshaphat had narrowly escaped death when he went out to battle in league with wicked Ahab. As he returned to Jerusalem, he was met by Jehu the seer. Jehu gave him a word from the LORD. *"Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD?”* Most Christians today would quickly answer, “Yes!” He had almost given his life for wicked Ahab. It was not as though he did not know how wicked he was. Jehoshaphat had cleansed his country of idolatry and knew Ahab promoted it in his own land. Surely he had heard of Elijah’s victory on Mt. Carmel and of Ahab and Jezebel’s response. He must have known how evil he was, and yet, he joined forces with him.

“Don’t be unequally yoked with unbelievers,” the Apostle Paul tells us. This surely was an unequal yoke. We know that God loves the world. Yet, here in this prophetic word, the wrath of God is upon Jehoshaphat because he helped the wicked and loved the man who hated the LORD.

Ahab had crossed the line so many times, and in spite of all the chances God had given him, he set his heart against the LORD and against His prophets. We must have a discerning spirit to know when we are assisting those who have set themselves against the Kingdom of God. We are not to help them or even love them. I can hear the gasp as you read that line. Hate the sin and love the sinner? Yes, unless they have come to the place where they know the truth and yet hate the

LORD. (see 2 John 10,11; Psalm 139:21)

Consider: Would God be pleased if we assist those who turn others from God?

**August 9 Evening**

Romans 5:6-8 *6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Without Jesus, we were all destined for the wrath of God. Most people do not realize the desperate condition man is in when he is without Jesus. “The soul that sins shall die” not just a physical death, but a second-death of judgment also. Rebellion of the creature against his holy and perfect Creator demands nothing less than eternal punishment. That was the justice waiting for us, and there was nothing we could do about it. Only one person could help, and He did.

Why should He have died for us? He is the Creator and we are the rebellious creation. If He was anything like us, He wouldn’t even have considered it. We might consider sacrificing our lives for a very good man. It’s not likely, but we might. But for a derelict that constantly rebuffed our kindness, mocked our concern, and doubted our intentions after abundant generosity on our part, we’d probably be glad to see him get his just deserts. Isn’t that what makes a great movie conclusion, when the bad guy gets what is coming to him? Thank God, Jesus isn’t like us.

God made a public demonstration of His love for us with the cross. When man was at his worst, torturing and murdering the very One that gave them life, He was showing the extent of His love for them. The contrast so extreme! The hatred and selfishness we each have was manifested in those people, and yet He willingly laid down His life for them, for us. That is love that goes beyond what we can imagine possible in the very best man, and yet it was seen in the man Christ Jesus. That love was demonstrated for us to have life. It was demonstrated so that we would know we can never be too bad for Jesus. It was demonstrated to assure our hearts of the depths of the love and grace that God has for us.

Consider: How will you respond to such love?

**August 10 Morning**

2 Chronicles 19:9-10 *9 He gave them these orders: "You must serve faithfully and wholeheartedly in the fear of the LORD. 10 In every case that comes before you from your fellow countrymen who live in the cities--whether bloodshed or other concerns of the law, commands, decrees or ordinances--you are to warn them not to sin against the LORD; otherwise his wrath will come on you and your brothers. Do this, and you will not sin*.

Jehoshaphat appointed judges according to the Law of God and ordered them to act in the fear of God, not taking bribes, and being impartial. He warned them that they were not judging for men but for God who placed them in their positions. We could say the same for any Christian in any activity. We should all do our work in the fear of God, knowing that we represent Him and not ourselves.

Then Jehoshaphat gave them the instructions in our text for today. Serve faithfully and wholeheartedly in the fear of the LORD. Whatever work we are called to, we, too, should serve faithfully and wholeheartedly in the fear of the LORD. Is that how you would describe your work ethic? If it is, God is glorified in your work.

The fear of the LORD is rarely mentioned today. The judges were supposed to make judgments in the fear of the LORD and to warn people that the wrath of God would come upon those who sin against the LORD. The fear of the LORD and His judgments were motivating factors of that day. Because we have a greater revelation of the love of God, should the fear of the LORD motivate us any less? I believe they should go hand in hand. As we read of kings whose hearts turned away from God and faced defeat and disease, we should recognize that it is love that brings wrath for the purpose of turning us. We should do all things in the fear of the LORD. That is having a healthy respect for His holiness and His Fatherly love.

Meditation: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Proverbs 1:7a

**August 10 Evening**

Romans 5:15-17 *15 But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! 16 Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. 17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ*.

It was because of Adam’s sin that death entered the world. Death reigned over all men. All felt the conviction of God because of sin. They sensed that judgment was to follow. What a weight Adam brought upon mankind!

It only took one man to bring a gift of grace, God’s grace, to liberate all that would come to Him for that gift. What contrasting elements these two brought into the world! The one brought death and the other life. But we are not just talking about man’s last breath and life after death. Those are just a part of death and life. Death is the reign of sin over us. Its destructive ways demand that all that is done be lifeless and damaging to you and all involved with you. It is more than a lifestyle. It is a tyrant that chains you to self-destruction. It is a master at torture. It promises and never delivers. It is the craving for salt in a man dying of thirst.

In a similar but contrasting way, the gift of Jesus Christ is life reigning in you. If you have received the abundant provision of grace and the righteousness of Christ, then through Jesus Christ you can live! That means that your daily life is a channel for His life to bring life to you and to those your life touches. Instead of the destructiveness we once lived under, all that we do works toward lasting goodness and wholeness. Instead of sin reigning over your thoughts, actions and desires, Jesus reigns. His very life steers you toward all that is good as you grow into His likeness. Life is more than a heartbeat. It is the reign of the Giver of life.

Consider: Is He reigning in you today, or are you a slave of sin and death?

**August 11 Morning**

2 Chronicles 20:2-4 *2 Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Sea. It is already in Hazazon Tamar" (that is, En Gedi). 3 Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. 4 The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him*.

In spite of Jehoshaphat’s lack of discernment, he knew what to do in time of trouble. This is a model chapter in how to face difficulty in our lives. Instead of running to his generals, he ran to the LORD. He resolved to inquire of the LORD. When we are alarmed, we will run to where our trust is placed. He proclaimed a fast. The people of the nation came together to seek God. From every town they came to seek Him.

We need to learn a lesson from this. We often put our heads together to come up with a solution. We are great at running to friends to ask for advice, like Rehoboam

did. We even grab a book like, “How to Deal with Troubled Teens.” What we need to do is be resolved to inquire of the LORD. When we do, those under our influence do also. Jehoshaphat’s good example led the nation down the only path that would save them. Believe it or not, America has had a nationally declared day of prayer and fasting in its history, too.

Once they decided they would wait upon God, He spoke to them! First, Jehoshaphat led them in a prayer in which he laid the situation before God. He declared that power belonged to God. He confessed their weakness and ignorance and that their eyes were upon God. Then they stood before the LORD with their wives and children and waited. What an example for us today! We need to learn to wait. God spoke through Jahaziel. God said the battle was His, and He gave them their marching orders.

Prayer: Lord God, help us to learn to turn to You first, recognize our need, and wait until we get Your answer.

**August 11 Evening**

Romans 6:11-13 *11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.*

When our Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross, He died to sin once for all. His resurrected life did not carry the sin that was laid on him. That sin was dealt with in His death. The Apostle is telling us to identify with Jesus’ death. If our sins were dealt with there in His death, we are raised with Him to new life. This new life does not carry the sin that the old life bore. Instead, it carries the life of God in Christ Jesus. We were once alive to sin, mastered and manipulated by it. Now we are alive to God.

The power that sin had to reign over us has been dealt with. We do not have to let it rule us any longer. Now we are free to offer our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness. Before the cross came into our life, we could have offered our bodies to righteousness, but we did not have the power to break the control of sin. Now that it is broken, we must offer ourselves to our new Master. Sin controlled us to bring death. Jesus masters us to bring life.

Once we offered our mouths for vile speech, our ears to hear gossip, our eyes to lust, and our mind to self-seeking. Now we can offer our mouths for instruments of praise and proclamation of the truth. We can offer our ears to the Spirit to hear His direction. We offer our minds to dwell upon the beauty of the Lord, His marvelous attributes. Have you taken the time to consciously go before the Lord in prayer and dedicate the parts of your body as instruments of righteousness? I would encourage you to do it now. As you do, the Spirit of God may remind you of His grief over the use of some of your members that should be given to life and not to death. Dedicate them to Him alone right now. He went to the cross and conquered death that you might do so.

Prayer: Lord, use my body for you glory. Keep my thoughts pure and holy. Use my arms to serve the needy, my feet to take me where You send me, my ears to hear your Word, my eyes to see the need around me, and my mouth to tell others of You.

**August 12 Morning**

2 Chronicles 20:21-22 *21 After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: "Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever." 22 As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.*

Yesterday we read about the people waiting upon God and getting His instructions on how to face the vast army coming against them. They believed and began to obey God. Jehoshaphat consulted with the people to see if they had the faith to put singers out front. Apparently they liked the idea. Since they truly believed that God was going to fight the battle and deliver them, they thought they might as well sing His praise for the splendor of His holiness on the way there. This huge men’s choir sang the same chorus that was sung at the dedication of the Temple. It must have been the national anthem of Judah.

If you ever attended a Promise Keeper event and heard tens of thousands of men sing praises to God, you have a taste of what this must have been like. The praise was not a part of the LORD’s instruction, but it was a natural response when they believed He was delivering them from their enemy. As they sang, the LORD turned the enemy upon one another. There was not one enemy soldier left alive. Judah took three days to gather all the spoils of war. There was more than they could carry away. On the fourth day they held a great praise festival at the Valley of Praise.

The people’s response to God’s word in the face of a major threat upon their lives is an example to us. They didn’t mope around or complain and whine, instead, they sang their thanks to God for who He is.

Consider: It is often in the midst of an expression of faith that the LORD delivers us from the thing we fear.

**August 12 Evening**

Romans 6:21-23 *21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Every person has experienced what it is like to be a slave of sin. Some mask the treachery better than others, but whether you are an adulterer or someone who thinks hateful thoughts toward a person, you have experienced sin’s control. Some of our choices under the dominion of sin were actually pleasurable for a time, but eventually we tasted of the death that came with them. The promise never measured up to the final experience, so we kept searching for something more, each thing leaving us, again, with the taste of death.

In Christ, we can break free from that cycle. We can choose the things of God that lead to life and fulfillment. Instead of ending with death, our actions can result in life. We want more and more, because we are increasingly blessed. We step into holiness and we desire more holiness. Unlike sin, the deeper you go, the more alive you are.

Here is the sum of the Apostle Paul’s argument. A life enslaved to sin pays you death. Work for the devil and you will get his reward. Your spirit will be void of life. Darkness and emptiness is what you will earn. But God freely gives life eternal in Christ Jesus our Lord. Earn death, or receive eternal life. Everyone must make the choice.

We make it once, but we also make it on a daily basis. Every day that Jesus is our Master (Lord), we experience eternal life. Every time we let sin control us, we experience death. Make the decision for life, but make it every day also.

Prayer: Lord, be the Master of my thoughts, my actions, and my words. Help me walk in You, in life, today, that others might see You.

**August 13 Morning**

2 Chronicles 20:35-37 *35 Later, Jehoshaphat king of Judah made an alliance with Ahaziah king of Israel, who was guilty of wickedness. 36 He agreed with him to construct a fleet of trading ships. After these were built at Ezion Geber, 37 Eliezer son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because you have made an alliance with Ahaziah, the LORD will destroy what you have made." The ships were wrecked and were not able to set sail to trade*.

Jehoshaphat went down in history as a godly king. Like most of the kings, he did not remove the high places. There was always a remnant of idol worship allowed to remain. Those places seemed to be the enemy’s stronghold in Judah that no one had the boldness to conquer. Though Jehoshaphat made his share of mistakes, overall, his heart was after God and he was said to have walked in the ways of Asa his father.

At the end of his life he had a chance to practice a lesson that he had learned early on as a king. Do you remember when he made the alliance with Ahab? A prophet warned him of God’s judgment for loving the one that hated God. (September 21) Ahab was the wickedest king of Israel.

In our passage today, Jehoshaphat again made an alliance with a wicked king of

Israel. It was not a war, just a business venture. They teamed up to build some ships. Solomon had imported great amounts of wealth, and perhaps these kings thought that they could do the same. The LORD destroyed those ships before they could set sail.

Jehoshaphat may have justified the situation in his mind saying, “It is only business.” When we learn a lesson, the LORD often allows us to face the temptation again to see if we have really learned it. Is our heart really given to God and not flesh in those situations? Jehoshaphat failed the test a second time and had this blot on his testimony.

Warning: Watch those areas of weakness where you think you have learned a lesson. They may come again to see if your heart has surrendered in that area to God. It is a chance to examine our heart and see what is not yet in the LORD’s hands.

**August 13 Evening**

Romans 7:23-25 *23 but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.*

Paul has described the knowledge of the Law causing us to be even more sinful.

Once we know the will of God, we discover we cannot help going against it. Our mind desires to do good, but the sin that lives in us has mastered us. We set out to do good and find ourselves doing evil. He saw his life as a prisoner of sin that worked in him.

Remember, the Apostle grew up as a Pharisee. He loved the Law. He memorized it and the rules around it. But he was honest enough to know that he was constantly not living up to its high demands. This creates guilt. The guilt makes us miserable. We realize we cannot do what we want no matter how hard we try. In desperation, he asks if there is someone who can deliver him from this vicious cycle.

Thank God there is Someone! Jesus Christ our Master! Then he summarized his old condition. My mind is a slave to God’s good law, but that nature that reigned in me was a slave to the evil law of sin. Jesus sets me free from that terrible agonizing conflict. When He becomes Lord, He reigns in my members as I offer them for His service (Romans 6:19).

The entire chapter that follows describes this new life, set free from the control of sin. 8:2 says that, *through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.* The conflict of chapter 7 is often quoted as if it should be our normal experience. NO! We are to be set free by letting Christ be the Master of our bodies and (as we saw in chapter 6) we should become instruments of righteousness.

Consider: Are you wretched or rescued?

**August 14 Morning**

2 Chronicles 24:2,5-6 *2 Joash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all the years of Jehoiada the priest… 5 He called together the priests and Levites and said to them, "Go to the towns of Judah and collect the money due annually from all Israel, to repair the temple of your God. Do it now." But the Levites did not act at once. 6 Therefore the king summoned Jehoiada the chief priest and said to him, "Why haven't you required the Levites to bring in from Judah and Jerusalem the tax imposed by Moses the servant of the LORD and by the assembly of Israel for the Tent of the Testimony?"*

It was really Jehoiada’s love for God and faith in His promises that motivated him to risk his life to see that the throne was restored to the lineage of David. Being Joash’s surrogate father, he had a great deal of influence on the king. Our passage today indicates that his influence kept Joash obedient to God as long as Jehoiada lived.

Joash, was probably a young teen when he ordered the collection of the temple tax. He wanted the temple repaired. Former Queen Athaliah had robbed the temple to finance the temple of Baal. When the priests were slow to obey the command, Joash called Jehoiada and asked him why he wasn’t seeing that the Word of God was being carried out. Now it is Jehoiada’s turn to reap what he had sowed. He sowed the word into Joash’s life and now Joash was requiring him to act on that word. For those who love the Lord, a challenge to obey is not a trial to bear. It is a blessing.

Sometimes the ones we mentor can turn around and mentor us in areas we are blind, or in which we making excuses. What better evidence could we have that our work in the LORD is being blessed and taking hold? Proverbs 12:1 tells us the man who hates correction is stupid. Proverbs 13:8 says the one who heeds it is honored.

Consider: Do you welcome the correction of others, even when it comes from someone you have taught?

**August 14 Evening**

Romans 8:9-11 *9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*

The Apostle saw things in black and white. He declared that every man and woman is controlled by the sinful nature or by the Spirit. The Spirit of God cannot live in someone without controlling him or her. Most Christians seem to think that the Spirit lives in them but they are often controlled by their sinful nature. That isn’t the teaching we find here.

Paul is telling us that if the Spirit of God lives in us, that old nature is dead to us, and our spirit is alive because of the righteousness of Christ. In 6:11 he encouraged us to consider ourselves dead to sin but alive to God. Yet, most Christians consider themselves alive to sin and barely alive to God. We have compromised the Word and the power of the resurrection. It is not that we must insist that we have become sinless, but that we must recognize the power of the resurrection to break the control of sin and replace it with the control of the Spirit.

Because of this common misconception, we tend to read verse 11 as something that will happen when we are physically resurrected one day off in the future. He is speaking of this very moment. The power of the Spirit that raised Jesus is at work in you, this very moment, to give life. Throughout the New Testament, death is walking in sin, and life is being in the Spirit of God. This physical house of our bodies can be made alive to obey the Spirit of Life, the Spirit of Christ, who indwells us. If Christ lives in you, consider yourself awakened to life, empowered to walk in holiness, and controlled by the Spirit of God.

Remember: Know that you are enabled by the power that raised Jesus to walk in newness of life.

**August 15 Morning**

2 Chronicles 24:17-18 *17 After the death of Jehoiada, the officials of Judah came and paid homage to the king, and he listened to them. 18 They abandoned the temple of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and worshiped Asherah poles and idols. Because of their guilt, God's anger came upon Judah and Jerusalem.*

Jehoiada the priest was a very positive influence on Joash and upon the nation of Judah. God’s grace allowed him to live to be 130 years old. Once he died, the officials of Judah began to exert their influence upon Joash. Instead of influencing the world around them with their faith in Jehovah, they wanted to be like the world and worship Asherah poles and idols. Joash was so influenced by them that the temple of God, that he had insisted be repaired, fell into disuse.

God sent prophets to warn the people that they would not prosper if they continued down this path. Today, in our culture, we need to be the voice that warns that our nation will not prosper if we continue our current trend of forsaking the worship of the true God. One of the voices that spoke out was Jehoiada’s own son, Zechariah. He warned that if they forsook God, He would forsake them. The officials convinced the king to have him put to death. This was the son of the man who had saved him and set him up as king. He signed the order and Zechariah was stoned in the Temple courtyard. When the voices of truth are silenced so that the people can go their own way without God, judgment is at hand. The next spring, the army of Aram came and killed all the officials who had such an evil influence and took the treasures of the city to Damascus. Joash lay wounded in his bed. His court servants assassinated him in revenge of the death of Zechariah. What a great beginning, but what a sad end!

We are tempted to not speak out for fear of facing Zechariah’s fate. The alternative is to face the fate of Joash.

Consider: Life is fatal. We will all give an account of our life before God. Better to try to call those you influence to God, in hopes of repentance, rather than to be silent and die when God judges the land.

**August 15 Evening**

Romans 8:28-29 *28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

Verse 28 is the most popular verse of believers today. It is easy to understand why. In this fallen world, sin causes such havoc in lives, so much pain. We can’t help but be affected by the consequences of the sins of others. The thief has come to kill, steal and destroy, and sometimes he is allowed to do that to our lives. We see that so clearly in Job’s story. It is an immense help to realize that God will, in some way we cannot yet perceive, cause the effects of that in our life to ultimately work for something good. The world does not love Him, and so it is not called to His purposes, but we do. The promise gives us a sure hope to cling to through the difficult times. Watch for the good thing God is working into your life through suffering.

The next verse tells us the ultimate good of the suffering we endure. It is conforming us into the image of Christ. It is causing us to rely entirely on our Father as Jesus did. It is teaching us to express faith and patience like Jesus did. We are learning to share others’ pain and joy like Jesus did. This is the destiny of every child of God, transformation into the likeness of the Son.

Whatever it takes to transform us, we will endure. You can help the process move along by being thankful instead of bitter. One of the greatest hindrances to the process is when we become angry at God for the suffering. The suffering inflicted is the enemy’s work. God is working to bring good out of it. You say, “Yes but God allowed it!” It is true, and the alternative is a world of robots that are not free to do anything but compulsory obedience. Then we’d be asking why a loving God would not let us be free. God has chosen the best route for you to be conformed to the likeness of His Son. It isn’t an easy route, but it is the best one. Have you blamed God for some tragedy in life? Realize that it was not God that brought it. It is God that brings good out of it if we love Him and are open to His transformative work.

Challenge: Memorize these two verses.

**August 16 Morning**

2 Chronicles 25:7-9 *7 But a man of God came to him and said, "O king, these troops from Israel must not march with you, for the LORD is not with Israel--not with any of the people of Ephraim. 8 Even if you go and fight courageously in battle, God will overthrow you before the enemy, for God has the power to help or to overthrow." 9 Amaziah asked the man of God, "But what about the hundred talents I paid for these Israelite troops?" The man of God replied, "The LORD can give you much more than that."*

Amaziah, son of Joash, began to reign at the age of 25. At first he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, but not with all his heart. He mustered the troops to battle against Edom. The forces were only a third of what they once were when godly kings reigned. He hired another 100,000 soldiers from Israel as mercenaries. Then a prophet of God came with the warning that is the text for today. “If you use these soldiers, God will cause you to be defeated, because it is God who decides the outcome of wars.”

Amaziah asked a question that is so much like what we would ask, “But what about all the money I paid already?” The prophet told him the obvious answer,

“God can give you much more than that.”

He sent the troops back, knowing that he was throwing away the money and infuriating them. The mercenaries did retaliate and raided some of the cities of Judah. It cost Amaziah to be obedient to God. God gave Amaziah the victory without them. The plunder would have been much more than the price he paid for the mercenaries. Don’t be tempted to use people and ways that God has not blessed. This is another illustration of the danger of yoking up with unbelievers.

Then he did one of the stupidest things recorded in Scripture. He took the idols of the people he defeated and began to worship them. They certainly hadn’t worked for their former owners. He forsook the God who gave victory for ones that couldn’t help. From that time on it was downhill for Amaziah. In our day, the enemy’s gods are subtler than idols. They come in the form of man’s wisdom and pleasures of this life.

Warning: Be careful to follow the LORD with all your heart so that when He gives you success, you do not turn to the powerless and vain things of this world, but stay wholeheartedly after the LORD.

**August 16 Evening**

Romans 8:37-39 *37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

We are not told that we will escape hardship, famine, danger and sword, but that in those difficulties we will be more than conquerors through Jesus. The spiritual battle that is manifested in the physical is Satan’s tool to cause us to turn from Christ, but God uses it to cause us to be more dependent on Him. Through the One who loves us, we don’t just end up victorious, but even more than that, we are increasingly transformed into the image of the Son.

Can anything separate you from His love? Paul was convinced that nothing could, and he should know. He went through shipwreck, beatings, scourging, lack of food, abandonment, and much more. Look what he lists here: death, life, angels, demons, present, future, any powers, height, depth, or anything else in all creation. That about covers it. If God is the Creator and is determined to love you, why would anything He made be able to separate you from His love?

What a sense of security the believer should have! If God didn’t spare His own Son to express His love to you, what could you possible fear? We should be as convinced as the Apostle Paul. In that conviction, we should rest secure, free from condemnation and worry about tomorrow and eternity. When you are convinced of so great a love, you find personal worth in it, peace, comfort, and joy unspeakable and full of glory. There is nothing that divine love will fail to see you through!

Consider: Are you convinced? If not, look again at the cross. Then, ask yourself if there is anything He will not see you through.

**August 17 Morning**

2 Chronicles 26:4-5, 16 *4 He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Amaziah had done. 5 He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success…16 But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.*

If you read yesterday’s devotion you will be wondering about verse 4. How could the author say that Amaziah did what was right in the eyes of the LORD? Perhaps the Old Testament authors knew more about grace than we give them credit. Many of the kings did terrible acts and yet were called right in the eyes of the LORD. The only way to really reconcile this is that the grace of God covered their sins because they had given their lives to God. This should encourage us that though we have backslidden at times, the grace of God covers ALL our sin. The stories of these kings are so much like the lives of Christians today. At a memorial service we hear the very same thing that the author writes here. Every person has failures and shortcomings but to what or to whom did they commit their soul?

There is a cycle of testing in the lives of most Christians that is similar to the one

Uzziah experienced. When they commit themselves to obeying God and serving

Him, they find their lives are blessed in many ways, including physical abundance. Here is where the testing becomes more difficult and the refinement more intense. We can go the way of Uzziah and become prideful, thinking our blessings are the result of our efforts and skills, or we can go the way of David, who humbled himself and realized that without God he was nothing. Both of these kings were credited as doing what was right in the eyes of the LORD, but one finished with a powerful testimony of repentance and restoration. The other, Uzziah, ended his life isolated and in shame. Much of the fruit of our actions is seen in this life, especially at the end of life. The prideful are then powerless, and those that flocked around them while they held power desert them. The humble, however, even though powerless, will be surrounded with the lives of those they have blessed.

Consider: Which will you be?

**August 17 Evening**

Romans 10:8-10 *8 But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

In chapters 9 and 10 of Romans, the Apostle Paul is describing his intense desire to see Jews come to believe in Jesus as their Messiah. He goes on to describe the problem they are having. In trying to obtain righteousness by keeping the Law, they are stuck in an impossible effort. To be righteous through the Law is only possible if you keep all the Law, and no one has ever been able to do that. But there is another righteousness that is found within the pages of the Law. It is the righteousness that comes from trusting in God. Paul quotes the prophet Joel as saying, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (v. 13)

In the passage for today, he sums up what the stories in the Law teach us. They show us that when Messiah comes, we need to trust in Him for our righteousness. Then, you will confess that righteousness is not from you but from the One who is your redemption. To confess Jesus is Master over all and believe that God raised Him from the dead is to place your hope entirely in Him. This is the only way to be saved.

What you believe in your heart cannot help but come from your lips. When you believe enough to confess, you will know you are saved. He becomes Lord of your mouth and reputation today. He does not merely remain an intellectual idea that you ascend to that gives you entrance into heaven, but He is your Master. You recognize that He is Master over all. You declare it in your conversations. When He is your King, you have entered the Kingdom.

Consider: Have you believed in your heart and confessed with your mouth? If so, you have the righteousness of Christ credited to your account. You are saved. If not, why not? Choose to do so now?

**August 18 Morning**

2 Chronicles 27:2, 6 *2 He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Uzziah had done, but unlike him he did not enter the temple of the LORD. The people, however, continued their corrupt practices…*

*6 Jotham grew powerful because he walked steadfastly before the LORD his God.*

Uzziah’s son, Jotham, learned from God’s quick and severe dealing with his father’s pride. He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and no exceptions to that are noted. The problem was in the people. Sometimes God will place a godly leader over a people whose hearts have turned away from God. His example to them should cause them to see the blessing of God is upon those who walk in His ways. Do you know someone who is full of the fruits of the Spirit? The peace, joy, and patience in their life should give you a hunger to walk more closely to the

LORD.

Sometimes the people will not heed the example God has given them. Then you can count on coming leaders to not be as godly and the nation to not be as blessed. Everyone makes choices, and those choices not only affect you but those around you. Jotham’s faithfulness showered a rain of blessing upon ungodly people. Perhaps that is why he died at the young age of 41. The people did not deserve the blessing he brought them through his godly life.

God gave power to Jotham because of his godly life. The word “steadfastly” is two words in Hebrew. It means to set one’s direction. He laid out a course and stuck with it. He aimed for God and would not swerve off course. In Colossians 3 the Apostle Paul tells us to set our mind and heart on things above. The writer of the Hebrew epistle tells us to hold unswervingly to the course we have set (Hebrews 10:23). Is your course set like Jotham’s was, or are you drifting? Do you know the direction of your goal, and have you decided to pursue that goal with all you have? Distractions are many and are often subtle.

Remember: Learn from both the good and bad examples of others, and keep your eyes fixed upon the goal, Christ Jesus.

**August 18 Evening**

Romans 11:25-27 *25 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. 27 And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."*

Paul called himself the apostle to the Gentiles, yet he had a great burden for his own people, Israel. He hoped the conversion of the Gentiles and their relationship with God would make the Jewish people jealous and desirous of knowing Jesus as Messiah.

Many Christians today believe the church has taken the place of Israel, yet many of the promises to Israel have not yet been fulfilled. We are living in the times of the Gentiles. Jesus referred to it in Luke 21:24. In the passage for this evening, Paul is instructing us that God has predetermined a number of Gentiles that will become His own. When that number is reached there will be a great conversion of the Jews. They will accept Jesus as Messiah. If that is the same time as Jacob’s trouble, the same as described in Zechariah, there will be a great number of lives lost and the remnant will turn to Jesus.

Israel’s various forms of godlessness and idolatry will end. They will be saved just as we are saved, through faith in Jesus. But if the times of the Gentiles ends, then the time of the restored kingdom of David will begin. The 1000 year reign of Christ on earth is one with Jewish traditions. The reality of all the types and shadows in the Old Covenant will be understood. The feasts will be observed with an understanding of what they truly represent.

Gentile reader consider: Are you making the Jews jealous with your daily walk with the Lord? Live in constant communion with Him so that others who observe your life might desire to have what you have found.

**August 19 Morning**

2 Chronicles 28:9-11 *9 But a prophet of the LORD named Oded was there, and he went out to meet the army when it returned to Samaria. He said to them, "Because the LORD, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand. But you have slaughtered them in a rage that reaches to heaven. 10 And now you intend to make the men and women of Judah and Jerusalem your slaves. But aren't you also guilty of sins against the LORD your God? 11 Now listen to me! Send back your fellow countrymen you have taken as prisoners, for the LORD's fierce anger rests on you."*

After Jotham died, his son Ahaz reigned. God gave the people a king that they deserved so that hardship would turn them back to Him. Ahaz’ army was defeated by the Arameans. Their treasures were robbed, and many of the people went into captivity. Then the Northern Tribes inflicted heavy casualties and took two hundred thousand women and children captive and a great deal of plunder.

As the army of the Northern Tribes returned to their capitol Samaria, a prophet of God named Obed met them. The message from God was that their victory was due to God’s anger against Judah, but they had gone overboard in executing it. God’s question to them was this, “Aren’t you also guilty of sins against the LORD your God?”

There are times when we find ourselves with the upper hand over those who oppose us, but we take it to the extreme. We should consider that it may not be so much that God is favoring us as God punishing them. God’s justice is always tempered with mercy, but man’s justice rarely is. We should consider that we could be in their shoes, and that we are to apply the Golden Rule. If we desire mercy, then we will act with a great deal more mercy. Aren’t we also guilty of sins? The Northern Tribes showed great wisdom and fear of God when they listened to the prophet and returned the captives along with the spoils of war.

Remember: How you act gives permission for others to act the same way toward you. God declares, “To those who show mercy, I will be merciful.” (Matthew 5:7; James 2:13)

**August 19 Evening**

Romans 12:1-2 *1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Whenever you see the word “therefore”, you should read before it to find out what it is there for. In the case of our passage for this evening, Paul had been expressing the wonder of God’s grace in the world drawing both Jews and Gentiles to Himself. Because God is so very gracious and merciful, the only appropriate response from us is to present ourselves like the Jews presented a sacrificial animal. We give our physical bodies to be laid upon the altar of God for Him to do with as He pleases. This means we are no longer claim the right to do as we please.

Unlike the animal sacrifices, we remain living and functioning at God’s direction. It is wonderful to become God’s tool for His use, but the problem with being a living sacrifice is that we can climb off the altar.

The sacrifice is holy. In the Old Testament, the altar was most holy and sanctified the gift. We cannot pollute God when we are surrendered; He sanctifies us. That means He makes us completely His for His use alone. This process is pleasing to God. Since we are to be for His use alone, we should not conform to the ungodly pattern of the world. The process of being sanctified begins with the transformation of our minds. As our way of thinking is renewed, we begin to see life in a different light. We see ourselves as servants and not masters. We see fulfillment in serving God and not in serving self. Only when our minds are renewed are we then able to test and approve of God’s will. Once our minds are transformed by His Spirit and Word, we can discern His good, pleasing and perfect will. Then we truly begin to live life as He meant us to live it.

Consider: Are you on the altar?

**August 20 Morning**

2 Chronicles 29:29-31 *29 When the offerings were finished, the king and everyone present with him knelt down and worshiped. 30 King Hezekiah and his officials ordered the Levites to praise the LORD with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness and bowed their heads and worshiped. 31 Then Hezekiah said, "You have now dedicated yourselves to the LORD. Come and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the temple of the LORD." So the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and all whose hearts were willing brought burnt offerings*.

Revival! Hezekiah was the next king, and he began to reign at the age of 25. The very first thing he did was to order the repair and cleansing of the Temple. He saw clearly that all the devastation that the nation had been through was because they had turned from Jehovah to the gods of their neighbors. As soon as the priests had consecrated themselves, they began removing the defiled things from the Temple. In only 16 days, the work was completed. They rejoiced because the work was done so quickly.

As the priests began the sacrifices, the musicians and singers began to make music. The people all bowed in worship. When the priest had completed the initial offerings, the king and all the people went to their knees. Then the Levites sang the psalms with gladness and bowed their heads in worship. There is a natural progression from songs of gladness and praise to worship and adoration for all that God is. Through worship, the people had dedicated themselves to God. Once dedicated to God, they could freely bring their offerings. They brought so many offerings that the Levites had to help the priests offer them.

This revival took place in the same pattern that many revivals have since. One man saw the desperate need and began to make a change. The leaders followed his example of dedication and commitment, and the place of worship was cleaned up of all that defiled it. Now that things are in order, the people follow and enter into worship, dedicating their lives to God. Finally, there is an abundance of gratitude and thanks for all that God is, so much so that there is hardly the capacity to contain or keep up with all that God is doing in the people.

Prayer: Revive us again, O Lord, and let it begin in me!

**August 20 Evening**

Romans 13:1-3 *1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.*

The Bible encourages us to be good citizens of the country in which we live. The reason given is that God has placed those people in authority. Understanding that God is sovereign over all the affairs of men gives us the incentive to see rulers as God’s appointees. To rebel against them is to rebel against something God has established. Should you incite insurrection, the authorities will exercise judgment upon you. If you don’t want to live in fear of that, be a good citizen and you will be commended.

Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world. When we get involved in attacking the government under which we live, we are involved in the temporal instead of the eternal. We have a much bigger battle to fight. Our focus should be on living as useful soldiers for the kingdom of light.

You might think that Paul could write this because Rome was a relatively good power. Remember that Paul was tried and put to death by Rome. He never changed his teaching, even in the face of persecution. He knew the Emperor demanded to be worshiped. He would never break the law of God to obey the laws of man. He is not asking us to do that. He is merely saying that we should recognize that God has given authority to keep order and peace to those who rule in our government. A good Christian will be a good citizen. Even when the Christian could not burn incense to the Emperor, he was not disloyal or planning to rebel against him.

Eventually Rome understood this. Don’t get involved in the wrong battles.

Remember: Keep your focus on what is eternal and trust God to deal with your government.

**August 21 Morning**

2 Chronicles 30:18-20 *18 Although most of the many people who came from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover, contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the LORD, who is good, pardon everyone 19 who sets his heart on seeking God--the LORD, the God of his fathers--even if he is not clean according to the rules of the sanctuary." 20 And the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people.*

Hezekiah had just come to power. The nation was in shambles because of the sins of the former king. The first thing Hezekiah did was cleanse the Temple and prepare to celebrate the Passover. He invited those from every tribe who had not been taken captive to join them in returning to the LORD. Many mocked him, but a great number humbled themselves and came to the feast.

Some of those who came had not gone through the ritual purification to be able to eat the Passover, but in their zeal to return to God went ahead and joined in the Passover meal. Hezekiah asked the LORD, who is good, to pardon everyone who had set their heart on seeking God, even though they had not gone through the ritual cleansing period. God heard and healed them.

The Old Testament is full of illustrations where the heart of man is more important than ritual or the details of the Law. Jesus reminded the religious leaders of His day of David eating the Shewbread that only the priest were allowed to eat (Mark 2:25-26). God looks at the heart. When people come out of sin to seek the LORD they are usually not cleaned up or familiar with what is acceptable. They may speak and even act in ways you consider un-Christian. Remember, God who is good, will pardon them if their heart is set on seeking Him. Let the Holy Spirit bring conviction and change. If you feel led to correct them, do so lovingly and gently. In this chapter there was great joy. It would have been dampened had Hezekiah rebuked all who were not up on the rules of the Sanctuary and the Passover meal. Instead, he encouraged the Levites who did know and did a good job according to the Word of God.

Consider: Be gracious with young Christians as God was gracious with these worshipers.

**August 21 Evening**

Romans 13:12-14 *12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

Darkness and night in Scripture are the conditions for evil. Those who do evil prefer not to be seen. It is the absence of the illuminating truth of God. Before we came to Christ, we preferred darkness, but now we are to step out of the darkness and into the light. We are to clothe ourselves in the armor of light. That means that wherever we go, people should see Jesus in us. We no longer participate in those things described in verse 13. In the light, we can see how destructive those things are. Because the light has changed the value we place on the things of the world, our behavior is different. The armor protects us.

As young Christians we must allow the light to test our former activities. We have a mindset that certain things are normal or even good, when in reality, they are of darkness. Once the light has exposed the true nature of the behavior, we must then allow the Word of God to correct our attitude toward it. Then we need the Spirit of God to change our habits.

Daily, we need to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. If we are covered in Him, we cannot step into darkness without flooding it with light. His presence shows the true nature of everything. The mind is the organ that most needs His presence. It is there that we entertain deceptive enticements that would have pleased our old self. But if Christ is there as Lord, we recognize those thoughts as deceitful and destructive and reject them.

Are you clothed in Jesus? Is your mind illuminated with His presence? When faced with temptation, consciously think about being in Him. Ask for the light of the truth to reveal the true nature of that temptation. Remember that you are a child of the Day and of Light. Allow Christ, who is in you, respond to the situation.

**August 22 Morning**

2 Chronicles 32:19-21 *19 They spoke about the God of Jerusalem as they did about the gods of the other peoples of the world--the work of men's hands. 20 King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz cried out in prayer to heaven about this. 21 And the LORD sent an angel, who annihilated all the fighting men and the leaders and officers in the camp of the Assyrian king. So he withdrew to his own land in disgrace. And when he went into the temple of his god, some of his sons cut him down with the sword*.

At this time in history, Assyria was conquering the known world. Its forces were unstoppable. They took Egypt and the nations around Judah. Israel had fallen. When they came to Judah, they took the fortified cities to the south. Archeologists have actually found pottery shards on which notes were written during the fall of Lachish and Azekah. There are still great murals in existence of the siege of Lachish by Assyria. But when they got to Jerusalem, they were unable to get through. They began with a propaganda war by saying that the God of Judah was like all the other gods that could not protect them from their great army. They had heard how Hezekiah had destroyed all the other gods and encouraged the worship of the one true God. The testimony had gone out into the world.

Here is something you don’t see much of in Scripture. The king and the prophet cry out to God. They present the Assyrian mockery of God to the throne of God. Hezekiah told the people of Judah that the Assyrian army only had physical power and military might, but they had the LORD God of the universe helping them!

The LORD heard their prayer and sent and angel that annihilated huge numbers of Assyria’s fighting men. History records that when the king or Assyria wrote his poem of conquest he said, “I shut up Hezekiah like a bird in a cage.” Reading between the lines, you see he was unable to take Jerusalem and had to give up his siege. Upon returning to Assyria, some of his sons assassinated him as he worshiped in the temple of his god. His god could not deliver Jerusalem into his hands nor could he save his life. Now whose god is a sad record of not being able to protect? The possession of military superiority does not matter. What matters is who is on the LORD’s side. I hope you are.

Consider: Anything other than the true God will fail and leave you disappointed and empty.

**August 22 Evening**

Romans 14:13, 17, 19 *13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.*

*17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,*

*19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*

If the body of Christ could learn this lesson, what a difference it would make! How many have turned away because someone argued over some insignificant conviction? There are any number of things that are not clearly forbidden to us in Scripture. Some folks believe one way and everyone one else has a different idea. The Apostle is telling us not to argue about it. The Kingdom of God is not about whether or not you drink a glass of wine, or eat steak, or worship on Saturday. Those things are up to your personal conviction determined by your understanding of God and His Word.

A mature Christian is able to set aside His personal convictions about things that are nonessential so that he or she does not stumble a weaker Christian. If I am among those who worship on Saturday, I will worship with them on Saturday. If I am among vegetarians, I will forego my right to eat meat. If I am with those who believe alcohol consumption is evil, I will certainly not drink alcohol. I will share with them righteousness, peace and joy in the Lord.

If we insist on our freedoms we may damage our weaker brother or sister. If we argue over matters, they may be encouraged to do something they do not have faith to do. Let the Holy Spirit convince them if it is necessary. Can’t we trust the Teacher to do His work in their lives? Our insistence on others seeing our perspective is often no more than pride. Do and say what leads to peace and mutual edification.

Remember: Share the many things you do have in common so that you will both be encouraged in the Lord.

**August 23 Morning**

2 Chronicles 34:27-28 *27 Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God when you heard what he spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD. 28 Now I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place and on those who live here.'" So they took her answer back to the king*.

The son of Manasseh was evil and soon was assassinated. His son, Josiah, was put on the throne at the young age of eight. By the time he turned sixteen he began to seek the LORD. He purged the nation of idols and ordered the repair of the Temple. In the process the Book of the Law was found. Apparently, things had been so bad for so long that the priests did not even know where a copy of the Law could be found.

When the Book of the Law was read to Josiah, he tore his robes and grieved over the sins of his fathers and the judgment promised in the book. Because the Spirit had not yet been poured out on all, he sent his staff to ask a prophetess living in Jerusalem if this justice was impending. She told them that God was going to keep his word and send the nation into captivity, but because Josiah humbled himself, tore his robes and wept before God, the judgment would not come in his lifetime. His eyes would not see the destruction of Jerusalem.

God is just and keeps His word, but He is also patient and generous. One man’s heart that was tender toward His word postponed the judgment. O that all God’s children would have such a tender heart toward the Word of God. When you read Scripture, do you allow it to speak to you personally and take it to heart as Josiah did? He did not think it was for other people or justify the words because he was not involved. He saw the application was for him and his nation personally and humbled himself. If there is one attribute we need more than any other as we read the Word, it is humility.

Remember: Humility helps us to hear God’s Word and take it to heart, not shrugging it off or appointing it to someone other than ourselves.

**August 23 Evening**

1 Corinthians 1:17-19 *17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. 18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."*

The city of Corinth was one of great decadence. There were probably over 100,000 slaves that pulled boats across the peninsula. A great Greek temple there had 1000 prostitutes. To live in Corinth was a real challenge for Christians.

The Greek culture also brought with it intellectual heights that man had attained. The converts in Corinth brought with them some of their cultural problems. They were debating about who was a disciple of whom, just as the Greeks took pride in their favorite philosopher.

Paul began his letter to them by declaring that the Gospel is not an intellectual competition. It is about the power of God to transform our lives. They needed to get their eyes off the ministers of the Gospel and fix them on Jesus. The same can be said today. Do you follow Luther, Calvin, Wesley, or the pope? It is not about the minister, but the One who they are proclaiming. If the gospel were an intellectual attainment, the cross would have no meaning.

To the Greeks, the thought of the cross being the way of salvation was intellectually laughable. To the Jews it was embarrassing, but to us who are saved it is the power of God. Though many try to make Christianity an intellectual religion, it is simply about the determined will of God whose mind we cannot comprehend. Logic has its place. Christianity is very logical to the Christian, but to the intellect trained in this world’s ways it is incomprehensible. Faith will always be required.

Paul is telling the Corinthians to turn from worldly debates and arguments that only separate us, and look at Jesus. He unites those who trust in Him.

Remember: The emphasis is always on the Savior, not His messenger.

**August 24 Morning**

2 Chronicles 35:20-22 *20 After all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order, Neco king of Egypt went up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah marched out to meet him in battle. 21 But Neco sent messengers to him, saying, "What quarrel is there between you and me, O king of Judah? It is not you I am attacking at this time, but the house with which I am at war. God has told me to hurry; so stop opposing God, who is with me, or he will destroy you." 22 Josiah, however, would not turn away from him, but disguised himself to engage him in battle. He would not listen to what Neco had said at God's command but went to fight him on the plain of Megiddo.*

Josiah had been a godly king and restored the temple worship, but the prophet had told him God’s judgments were inevitable. In our passage today, Josiah does what seemed good, but not at God’s leading. In fact, God warned him through the mouth of a heathen king. Carchemish must have been an ally of Judah and it seemed to make sense to fight together their common threat, Egypt. The words of the king of Egypt should have given Josiah reason to seek God’s plan. When we step out on our own, with our own reason, we can place ourselves in harms way. God is faithful to warn us, even through the lips of an unbeliever. Remember in Jesus’ day when the High Priest said, “It is better for one man to die than the nation to perish”? Though he did not know it, it was a prophetic word (John 11:49-51).

We shouldn’t ignore what unbelievers say when they are rebuking us. It may be the Lord. I have heard unbelievers say, “I thought you trusted in God.” Ouch. God will use those who are unbelievers to remind us to look to Him.

Josiah was a great king and gave the nation one more chance to turn back to God, but he put himself in a position to be taken out of the scene early by not being sensitive to God’s warnings.

Remember: The rebuke from an unbeliever may come at the Lord’s command.

**August 24 Evening**

1 Corinthians 2:2-5 *2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.*

In this passage, Paul is describing the difference between the wisdom of men and the wisdom of God. He wrote that God trips men up in their worldly wisdom. The work of salvation is not an intellectual enlightenment but a work of the Spirit of God drawing us to Christ. He becomes the Wisdom of God to us.

Then Paul illustrates his point by describing how he acted when he was with them. He intentionally focused on two things, Jesus and His death on the cross. He knew that the Greeks were into intellectual debates, but he also knew that he needed to stay focused on what mattered. How far we often wonder from the central truth when we begin trying to prove our points, tit for tat, with a skeptic. When Christ draws them, they will yield or they wont. How many arguments have you observed where neither party was open to one thing the other said? I think that describes most arguments.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that he did not follow this route of reliance on the mind of man. He didn’t cajole and plot to manipulate while sharing Christ with them. Instead he allowed the Spirit of God to work through him. One reason he preached in that manner was so that they would not rely on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power. If their faith rested on the wisdom of men, the next clever speaker would have them off in another direction.

Consider: Do you rely on wisdom of men or the demonstration of the Spirit and of power? Certainly we should study our Bible and understand the passage we share as fully as we can, but what are we trusting to move the heart of our listeners?

**August 25 Morning**

2 Chronicles 36:15-16, 21 *15 The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. 16 But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.*

21 *The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.*

The LORD kept sending the prophets with warnings, because he had pity on his people. Judgment would come, but their receptivity to the word of God would have made a world of difference in their transition to captivity. Because they were so hard hearted, despising God’s word and scoffing at His prophets, the conquest by Babylon was brutal. Young and old were slaughtered, and everything of value was taken. The Temple was burned.

The harder we make our hearts, the more devastating the circumstances must be to wake us up and turn us back. They had faced humiliating defeats during the reign of the last four kings, but none of those defeats caused them to humble themselves before God and turn to Him. There was no remedy. God looked for another way, but there was none. Often people ask how God could have allowed a disaster to happen. In many cases, it is because there was no other remedy. Nothing less would turn people from the hardness of their heart.

Israel had ignored the law of Sabbath rest for many centuries. Every seventh year they were not supposed to plant, but just let what came up on its own be sufficient for them. If they had ignored this law for 490 years, then the land was due for 70 years of Sabbath rests. That is exactly what happened. The land had its rest, and the people had their humiliation and change of heart. Those who returned would be intolerant of idol worship and possess a fear of disobeying God. The following devotions moves into the period of restoration, when the people were allowed to return and build the Temple again. God was preparing them for a great redemption, the coming of the Messiah.

Prayer: Lord, help our country to turn to You before there is no remedy.

**August 25 Evening**

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 *5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe--as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.*

Paul returns to one of the main reasons for writing this letter, quarrels and divisions. He told the Corinthians that when they take sides on issues and set themselves against one another that they are acting like the world and not like Christians. Jesus’ command was that we love one another. That does not mean that we never correct or instruct, in fact, that may be the hardest expression of love.

This church had formed a number of factions based on who they admired most as a teacher. It is not an evil thing to admire one teacher over another, but they had taken it another step and formed opposing groups that quarreled over which speaker was best. We have the same thing today with denominations. The fact that one group prefers Wesley’s teaching over Calvin’s or Luther’s is not bad. It is when we divide up the church into arguing factions that we are acting like the world. It can happen within an individual church. One group starts preferring one teacher over the preacher, or the preacher over an old timer who has kept the church going through tough times in the past.

Paul brings them back to the central issue. The leaders are merely servants. We all play a part, but it is God who makes things happen. We are nothing in and of ourselves. Any good you see in man is the presence of the Savior. Let us all focus on Him and His command to love one another. Without Him, the teacher, the preacher, the old faithful deacon and elder are nothing. Refuse quarreling and insist on loving. Give and receive correction in love. We can all learn from one another. Consider others better than yourself (Philippians 2:3). Politics and factions have no place in the church of Jesus Christ. Leave that treachery to the world.

Remember: If we cannot love one another, we need to examine our relationship with Jesus Christ.

**August 26 Morning**

Ezra 3:3 *3 Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening sacrifices.*

Over 40,000 of the captives returned with that first group, led by Jeshua and Zerubbabel. The amazing thing is they returned with over 7000 servants and animals, personal possessions of gold and silver. Captivity had not been that hard on them. Many had prospered.

When they arrived, the first thing they began to do was to build the altar. The Temple footings had not been laid. The walls of the city lay in ruins, but they focused first on the altar. It had been 70 years or more since a priest had offered the morning and evening sacrifices. As they studied the Law and saw the need for the lamb to be slain for their sins, they were most anxious for the sacrifice to begin again.

Before we can do anything of value, we need to be right with God. The blood of the lambs did not wash away their sin, but looked forward to the Lamb of God who would be the perfect sacrifice. They wanted to be obedient to the Word of God and do as they were instructed. Unlike most of the world today, they had a fear of God and His wrath upon sin. In fact, they feared God more than they did the people around them that threatened to rob and destroy them. Perhaps this was one good lesson they took from the captivity.

Is the sacrifice more important than your temple and city walls? Is the cross and all that it means more important than your church building, appearances, and physical security? If you understand God’s attitude toward sin, His hatred of evil, then it should be. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God

(Hebrews 10:31).

Thank God for the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!

**August 26 Evening**

1 Corinthians 3:14-16 *14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. 15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. 16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?*

The Corinthian church had divided into factions over who was the best instructor. Paul is telling them that the value of a person’s life will be revealed on the Day of Judgment. On that day, everyone’s work will be tested by fire. We think someone has done so many things for God, but when the fire hits, what will be left? The fire tests the motives and therefore the ultimate lasting value of the works done. Fire reveals the source of the works. That which was initiated by the Spirit and done in the power of the Spirit will be lasting.

Paul compared the church to a building and a field. We all labor in it in one way or another. The point he is making is that not all labor is lasting. Some of us will arrive in heaven with nothing to show for our life on earth. We have been saved by the blood of the Lamb, but we did absolutely nothing of lasting value about it. All the work we did was out of our own nature and for the impure motive of pride. We scratched around in the field and banged on the building, but we never really invested in eternity.

Jesus warned us to lay up treasures for ourselves in heaven. Those who do so will find the reward was well worth the investment we made. God’s interest rates are fantastic. We have something of value to gratefully lay at the wounded feet of our Savior. He will return those treasures to us, for He said, *“Lay up for yourselves…”*

We are the temple of God. We are His building. Are you letting Him direct your activity? Are you a house of worship? How we listen to and obey the Spirit within us is directly proportional to our treasure in heaven. These thoughts in the verses above are together for a reason. Don’t neglect to listen to the Spirit. Quench not the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). Don’t let His abiding presence be in vain.

Remember: He came in to save your soul, but also to save your daily life.

**August 27 Morning**

Ezra 3:11-13 *11 With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: "He is good; his love to Israel endures forever." And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. 12 But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. 13 No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away*.

The altar was built first, and then the foundations for the Temple were laid. The priests dressed in their priestly robes, with the instruments prescribed for the singing of praise, began to sing the chorus that had been sung 500 years earlier when the first temple was dedicated. I think we’ll be singing the same song when the last temple, New Jerusalem, is completed. It is the song of endless ages, for the goodness of God never changes.

Surely the elderly were crying with mixed emotions, remembering the sins that brought the Temple down, the grace that kept them through the conquest and captivity and now restored them to their land. God kept His word, but who could have imagined in the midst of the horror, that it would even be possible to build the Temple again. The cry that went up was mixed with the joyous praise of the younger people who had only heard of a temple. They had been taught about the sacrifices and the service of the Temple. They had heard descriptions, and now they were the ones who would one day tell their children of seeing the foundations laid.

We have foundations too. The names of the Apostles are on our foundation. When we sing that song in the completed final temple, some will remember when the foundations were laid. They’ll remember hearing the teaching of the life and sayings of Jesus from the Apostles. I imagine there will be a great shout then.

Consider: Stranger and pilgrim in the earth, are you looking for the city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God? You don’t have to wait to sing the song. You can start now singing, *“He is good and his love endures forever”*.

**August 27 Evening**

1 Corinthians 5:4-6 *4 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. 6 Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?*

In the church in Corinth, a man had an illicit relationship with his stepmother. The Corinthian church did nothing about it, in fact, they thought it showed how tolerant they were. The Apostle Paul told them they should be ashamed and immediately expel him from their congregation. The next time they gathered Paul promised to be with them in spirit, and when the power of the Lord was present, they were to hand the offender over to Satan.

When we gather, we have the prayers of those who care for our church. God’s power is present in those willing to do His will. But what does this mean, “hand him over to Satan so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved”? When someone is ejected from the covering of the local fellowship, they are out from under the umbrella of blessing, comfort and encouragement it provides. They have chosen to give in to a sinful desire, and it will enslave them, dragging them to ever increasing wickedness. When a believer goes this route, the discipline that comes as the consequences of sin can be very severe. Not only does the physical suffer, but there is agony of soul and spirit as well. If that will not open their eyes and turn them to repentance, what will?

Verse 11 tells us under what conditions the church should do this. When you have an unrepentant sexually immoral person, or one given to greed, idolatry, slandering, drunkenness, or swindling, for their sake, and that of the body, we must remove them. Paul tells them why. A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough. Unconfronted sin infects the whole group. A body of worshipers can digress into a body of slanderers. Sin is contagious! By not dealing with these serious forms of rebellion toward God, we send an unspoken message that it is permissible. Not many churches are willing to take this stand, and that is one reason we have so many unhealthy churches.

Remember: Stand for righteousness in love.

**August 28 Morning**

Ezra 4:1-3 *1 When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for the LORD, the God of Israel, 2 they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, "Let us help you build because, like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here." 3 But Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, "You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the LORD, the God of Israel, as King*

*Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us."*

When the people of God get serious about worshiping God, the Enemy always incites our enemies to try and distract us. We see the same statements today. “We all worship the same god. All religions basically teach the same thing. Let us help you.” It may be possible to work together on some social issue, but when it comes to the temple of God, we have nothing in common. We do not serve the same God! We do not teach the same thing! The temple must be holy. That was the problem that brought about the captivity. The worship of Jehovah was mixed with religions of the nations they had displaced. We must be honest about the differences in our faith. If we believe Jesus is the only way to God, we should not be bashful about it, but instead have a loving boldness to share the truth for the sake of their eternal destiny.

Some pastors are not concerned if all the staff knows the Lord as Savior. They believe everyone has a natural gift and can use those gifts for the church. That idea ignores the spirit of this passage. When it comes to building the temple, we need sanctified servants of God, or we will find the work is corrupted and compromised by the enemy.

Once they were told that they could not help, they hired advisors to do two things. The first was to discourage them. The second was to make them afraid. That is the enemy’s tactic to this day. If he can’t get in directly, he will try to cause discouragement and fear. Those are attitude problems. Don’t give in to them for a moment.

Encouragement: Be strong in the LORD and in the power of His might and build!

**August 28 Evening**

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 *18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. 19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*

The world cannot understand why Christians are so concerned about sexual sin. Indeed, we seem to be overly concerned about the sexual sins of the world when they know no better. The Apostle Paul helped the Corinthians, who lived in a very immoral society, to understand why it was important for them to avoid this type of sin. Sexual sins affect your body. The Christian’s body is supposed to be dedicated to God like the vessels of the Temple, for holy use. When it is used for sexual sin, it is defiling the temple of the Holy Spirit.

He warned them to flee from sexual immorality. The best way to avoid temptation is to run from it. If you linger around temptation, eventually it will get to you. Don’t just walk away, run! Sexual immorality, while capturing your body, will also capture your thought life. Compromise becomes the rule instead of the exception. It is very similar to drug addiction. Once it has your body, it is very difficult to be free again. That is why the Apostle tells us to flee from it.

Obedience in this regard is in your own best interests, but Paul adds that we should be thinking of Christ’s interests. He bought you. He paid the highest price that could be paid, because it was Satan’s asking price for your freedom. Since you were redeemed from being his slave and are now Christ’s servant, honor God with your body. Sexual immorality dishonors the One who paid such a high price for you. If you are in sexual sin, or lingering near the temptation of it, stop and consider the cross. Would you dishonor the cross by yielding your body to immorality? Then consider how you can flee from it. Take practical steps. Find a trustworthy friend to keep you accountable.

Remember: The cost of giving in is higher than you can imagine. Glorify God with your body.

**August 29 Morning**

Ezra 7:9-10 *9 He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was on him. 10 For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.*

Three times in Ezra chapter 7 we have the expression, “*the gracious hand of his God was on him”.* He did certain things because of God’s hand upon him. He had favor with the king and was given whatever he asked for because the gracious hand of God was upon him. He was on his way with more exiles and finances and sacrifices to assist in the rebuilding of Jerusalem and to offer the sacrifices the king had sent. Ezra must have made some kind of impression on the king, but I think he would say that this came about because the gracious hand of his God was upon him.

Of course, God has no physical hand, so what does this mean? When a few generations pass, the apostles would lay their hands on others so that they would be healed or filled with the Holy Spirit or sent out into a ministry calling. Their hands represent God’s hand to bring God’s children to the fullness of His call upon their lives. The picture of God’s gracious hand upon us should give us a rush of joy and encouragement. Surely every born again child of God has the hand of the Lord upon them in some degree. What can bring that out in a greater display like that which we see in the life of Ezra?

In the above verses, we have the reason why. He devoted himself to studying, obeying, and teaching the Word of God. It’s a simple, clear and powerful answer clearly seen in the passage. It is available to every reader. It is the call upon every reader, for whatever your calling is, you need to study and observe and, in some manner, teach the Word of God. There are only a few things that Scripture encourages us to be devoted to. One is the study and obedience to the Word. The others are to be devoted to seeking the LORD (Jeremiah 30:21), to doing what is good (Titus 3:8,14) and prayer (Colossians 4:2). It is impossible to do one without doing them all.

Consider: Would you like the gracious hand of God upon your life? Devote yourself to study, obey, and teach His Word.

**August 29 Evening**

1 Corinthians 9:24-25, 27 *24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.*

*27 … I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize*.

The Apostle Paul gave up whatever rights he needed to give up to connect with the people he was trying to win and teach. To him, the most important thing was not his personal desires or advancement but the spiritual growth of those to whom he was ministering.

In this passage, he compares his attitude toward ministry to a Greek athlete. An athlete doesn’t do what is comfortable or take the easy route. He has a goal and denies himself to reach it. He puts boundaries on his desires and freedom so that he can reach that goal. He pushes himself to the very limits of his ability and endurance. Then when he is in the race, he gives it all he has to win. He ignores his body’s demands and goes all out to win, and all he gets is a little momentary glory and a crown of leaves that soon decay. Paul is doing it for an eternal crown and encourages us to do the same.

Paul wrote that he made his body his slave. He did not give in to its demands. He knew that if he did give in, he would not obtain the prize he was after. When the Greeks broke the training rules they were disqualified. Paul did not want that to happen to him in the spiritual sense. He worked late into the night to support himself when he thought the church might be offended if he asked for the support he deserved. What an example he set for us!

Is your body your slave or your master? Are you running for a temporal crown or an eternal one? Are you running to take first place or just jogging along comfortably? When we look at the ministry of the Apostle Paul, we can see he really lived what he wrote. He was out to take first place. What is your pace?

Consider: How would your life change if you went all out for your Savior?

**August 30 Morning**

Ezra 8:21-23 *21 There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. 22 I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him." 23 So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.*

When Ezra had gathered everyone for the journey, he proclaimed a fast. It was a time to humbly ask the LORD for His protection. He could have asked for armed guards, but he had already told the king that the gracious hand of God was on everyone who looks to Him. It would not be much of a testimony to turn around and ask for the strength of man after trying to share that with the king. Do we think like this? Do we remember what we have shared of the truth of our LORD with unbelievers and then carefully guard the testimony by being faithful to live in demonstration of it? I’m afraid we water down our words by our actions more than we verify our words by our actions.

I wonder if Ezra thought, “I put my foot in my mouth now! I’m going to have to make this trip with valuable possessions but without armed guards because I told the king God’s hand was on us and against our enemies. We better pray!”

We are not in the habit of dropping everything, especially eating, and going to God until we get an answer. We could certainly learn from their example here. Ezra says God answered their prayer before they left. It was done before they broke camp. They didn’t have to see it to believe it. In some way that is not recorded, they had the assurance that the prayer was already answered. May the LORD teach us to pray with such fervor and hear the answer with this kind of convinced assurance.

Remember: The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to Him!

**August 30 Evening**

1 Corinthians 10:11-13 *11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. 12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

Paul always gives a Scriptural passage to back up what he is teaching. Just before this passage, he reminded the reader about Israel’s sins in the wilderness and how God dealt with them. He concludes by saying that those things were examples to us. This shows us how valuable the Old Testament can be to us today. Paul is clarifying thoughts that he addressed from the beginning of this letter. Divisiveness and immorality should not have any place in the church of Jesus. Take a warning from God’s dealing with Israel. God has not changed.

The warning continues with those powerful and humbling words, “… *if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!”* The Proverbs of Solomon tell us that pride goes before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). It is easy for us to think of someone else when it comes to these issues. Paul is saying that we need to take a look in the mirror before we look anywhere else. Pride is at the root of the sin of divisiveness. A realization of the weakness of mankind should keep us all cautious of becoming spiritually proud.

Then he gives us an encouraging and sobering truth. Every temptation we experience is common to mankind. Every time a believer is tempted, the faithfulness of God provides a way of escape so that we can stand up under that temptation. We can never claim that we just couldn’t do it. We can never say we were overpowered and had to surrender. When we do, we are saying God was not faithful, but in reality it is we who were not faithful. We did not take the way out that He provided.

Remember: Take time to read those examples God so faithfully had recorded for us. Take the way out of temptation that He has provided.

**August 31 Morning**

Ezra 10:10-12 *10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have been unfaithful; you have married foreign women, adding to Israel's guilt. 11 Now make confession to the LORD, the God of your fathers, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives." 12 The whole assembly responded with a loud voice: "You are right! We must do as you say*.

When Ezra had heard how the remnant had broken God’s law by marrying the pagan women of the land, he tore his robes and wept and fasted. The people followed his lead and were convicted of sin. It was the people who encouraged him to tell them what to do to set things right with God. Ezra replied with the verses above; confess and do God’s will. Separate yourselves from the people and wives who had those horrible demonic religious practices.

We do not live in Israel and were never forbidden to marry a certain group of people, but the principle remains true. That is why the Apostle Paul told us not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). That could apply to marriage or business. When we find we are with people of evil practices, we should not commit ourselves to any type of united endeavor with them. How can two walk together except they be agreed (Amos 3:3)?

But there is a deeper principle. What fellowship does light have with darkness? If we are walking in the light, we will be repulsed by the sin and have a desire to show those in darkness the way to be freed from its bondage. Some Christians will play on the edge of the cliff of sin because the allurement is enticing them. Coach Bill McCartney said, “Draw a line where there is a danger of being caught by sin and stay ten yards back.” Don’t walk along the very edge of a cliff.

In this final chapter of Ezra, the men sent their foreign wives and children away. That seems very harsh of God, but the situation existed because of disobedience to

God. It was the only remedy. Not dealing with the issue had caused the downfall of Israel in the past. We must cut off from our lives the thing that is enticing us to sin and send it away from our lives if we are going to go on with God.

Consider: If you want God’s blessing, confess the sin. Do God’s will. Separate yourself from the sin.

**August 31 Evening**

1 Corinthians 10:31-33 *31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God-33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.*

The Christian life is about living for another out of love. I’m referring to the One who died and conquered death that He might be with you. It is an all-out, 100%, way of living. In everything that is done, we seek the glory of God, even in the little menial tasks of daily life. It isn’t a thing you do on Sunday morning and in the five minute daily devotion time. It is your whole life’s focus.

In living for the glory of God, we seek to share Him with others. One thing that must grieve God deeply is when we offend someone who knows we are a Christian. As a representative of Jesus, we have pushed them away from Jesus. That usually takes place because we are selfish and demanding our own preferences. We are being completely inconsiderate of the way they see and understand life and their need to find Jesus as Savior. We please ourselves but give up the greatest privilege we could have, which is sharing the love of Jesus with them.

Paul is telling us part of the reason he was so fruitful in his ministry. He did his very best to not to cause anyone to stumble. That does not mean that he compromised the truth. One look at his life tells you that is not the case. But he did consider others’ cultures and limited his actions so as not to unnecessarily offend them. He acted for their good and not his own, so that they might be saved.

Dear reader, remember that you are the only expression of Jesus that many will see. Do whatever you can to draw the lost to Christ, not repel them. Their salvation is worth more than any liberty that we might cling to. Take on Paul’s motto of trying to please everyone in every way in order to win them to Jesus. Seek their good over your own that they might be saved.

**September 1 Morning**

Nehemiah 1:2-4 *2 Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. 3 They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." 4 When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven*.

Ezra had been successful in restoring the Temple and turning the people away from compromise, but the city was still vulnerable because the walls were in ruin. Thirteen years after Ezra’s trip, Nehemiah heard the news from a relative, that the people were discouraged and living in fear because the walls were not restored.

Nehemiah immediately did the same thing Ezra did when he heard news that the people of God were in trouble. He wept, mourned, fasted and prayed. He took the issue straight to the One who could do something about it. Great men of God have a heart for the people and know where the answer to their need is found. His prayer follows a pattern we see throughout the Word of God. First, he adores God. It helps us to remember the omnipotence of the One to whom we are praying. He confesses his sins and the sins of his ancestors. Confession reminds us of who we are and our position of not deserving all the kindness God pours out on us. Then he reminds God of His word. It is not as though God needs to be reminded, but it gives us faith to ask and the confidence that we are praying according to God’s will. If you pray according to the Word of God, you know you are praying the right thing. Finally he asked God for the favor of the king, because he is going to ask him for help in this matter.

Nehemiah was in a very trusted security position. He must have earned that position through years of faithful service and a display of integrity. Those years of commitment may have seemed to have little impact on the Kingdom of God, but they led up to this one moment of influence.

Consider: God knows where He has you and why He has you there. Be faithful and He will use that influence in His time.

**September 1 Evening**

1 Corinthians 11:23-25 *23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."*

Paul claims to have received this tradition from the Lord Himself. It is the key passage that we refer to when we have communion. We find that the Gospels tell us the same thing. We are to remember the Lord’s death for us on a regular basis. The bread is to remind us of His body that was broken for us. The cup is to remind us we have entered into the new covenant.

The author of Hebrews tells us that the body of Christ is the veil that was torn to allow us access to the Holy of Holies in heaven (Hebrews 10:19-22). Because Jesus died in our place, we have access to God. When we take the bread of communion, we remember the great price that was paid and the privileges we now have because of it. It also reminds us that we are the body of Christ. Though we are many different parts, we are a part of the whole. In this passage, Paul was warning them to be considerate of one another at communion to be sure all could participate. Some were sick and even died because they were taking it lightly and without consideration of other members of the body. He warned us to examine ourselves first.

The cup is representative of the blood of the new covenant. Believers are not under the old covenant of law, but the new covenant of grace. The old was based on our obedience, but the new is based on what Christ has done. The new covenant was predicted to include the very presence of the Spirit of God within us. Covenants were ratified by blood and often by a wound in the hand of the participants. The new covenant is dependent on only one party keeping the terms and so the wound is on His hands alone. Communion calls us to consider these things, but most of all it calls us to remember He gave His life that we might truly live in Him.

Remember: The next time you participate in communion, remember His body was broken for you. Remember the new covenant made with His blood.

**September 2 Morning**

Nehemiah 2:17-18 *17 Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." 18 I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.*

Nehemiah went in to serve the king his wine with a sad face. The king had never seen him like that, so he asked what was wrong. Nehemiah shot a quick prayer to God, and though he was afraid, he made the request the Lord had put on his heart. He could have lost his job and even his head, but the gracious hand of God was upon him. The king gave him orders to return and rebuild the wall, soldiers to protect him on the journey, and orders for timber from the forests. The king just wanted to know when he would be back. That shows you how trusted and liked Nehemiah was.

When Nehemiah arrived, he surveyed the damage. Then he gathered all the officials and told them why he had come and the testimony of how God had given him favor before the king. The people responded to the vision and wanted to get started.

God puts a burden on individuals’ hearts for what He wants to do through men. He inspires leaders to get support. God is the one that gives favor. We will often fear our situation, but when we commit it to God in prayer, we will see God touch hearts. Finally, we need to share the testimony to encourage others to see God at work. Soon after an inspiring beginning, opposition often shows up. Leaders of surrounding people groups came to claim Nehemiah was rebelling against the king. It was an old trick that had some success in the past, but not this time. Nehemiah focused on what God wanted done, not the taunts of the enemy.

Consider: Nehemiah’s testimony stirred the people to share the vision. Do you have a testimony to share of how God has been leading you?

**September 2 Evening**

1 Corinthians 12:7, 11, 18 *7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*

*11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.*

*18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.*

This chapter is about the gifts of the Spirit. Various denominations and schools of doctrine interpret what is meant by each gift differently, but there is one thread running through the teaching on gifts that seems to be the main point. Whatever the gift, it is for the common good. It is to build up others in the body of Christ. We are dependent on one another just as a body is dependent on its other parts.

Whatever the gift, it is distributed as the Spirit sees fit. All gifts are from the same Spirit, so gifts are not going to be opposing other gifts. Together, the gifts are for a whole and healthy body of believers. We can ask for the more beneficial gifts, but God is the One who arranges the parts as He desires. He sees the whole picture and knows who needs which gift in each fellowship.

We have run into a great deal of trouble in the modern church by insisting we all have the same gift. Some churches believe everyone has the gift of evangelism, while others believe everyone has the gift of tongues. There are a diversity of gifts distributed as God sees fit for the common good. Some of the less noticeable gifts are the most needed and therefore the most common. Just because your gift is not the showiest, don’t think it is not as important to the body as the one who speaks forth the Word. Without you, the body would be handicapped. Understanding how and why God distributes the gifts makes it important for us to find a place of fellowship where we are ministered to and can use our gift.

Consider: Have you found the place where the body functions and become a functioning member yourself? That is God’s plan for you.

**September 3 Morning**

Nehemiah 4:16-18 *16 From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah 17 who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, 18 and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me*.

The enemies of Judah were furious over the wall being built. The remnant had worked hard, and the wall was half finished. The leaders of their enemies began to insult their work in range of their hearing to discourage them. When the enemy insults you, know that he is afraid at the work being done through you. About the time they became tired and discouraged from the insults and by the massive amount of rubble to be moved, the enemy began to plan an attack. The enemy often attacks when we are physically weary and discouraged. He watches for the weakest moment. But the Jews got wind of their plot.

Nehemiah had half of the men guard the other workers. The ones who hauled the materials had a weapon in one hand and worked with the other. The builders had their weapons handy. They devised a plan to rush to the aid of any place where the trumpet was blown. From the crack of dawn until it was too dark to work, they built and watched for the enemy. When the enemies found their plan was discovered, they gave up on the idea of an attack.

We are building too. We are laborers for the Kingdom of God. Some of us haul material and some of us stand guard, but all of us need to have our sword at our side. We need the Word of God in our hands ready for the battle. The enemy will try to discourage and insult you because he is the Accuser of the brethren. That is the time to take heart. He is attacking because he sees the good work done through you. If you are a laborer on the wall, get a brother to cover your back and watch for you in prayer. Listen for the trumpet call so that you can help your brothers that are being attacked. They may be working on a different section of the wall, but remember it is all a part of the same wall.

Encouragement: Before we know it, every stone will be in place and the New Jerusalem will descend.

**September 3 Evening**

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 *1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

This is the chapter on love. The previous chapter is about the gifts of the Spirit, and it ends with Paul declaring that he will show us a more excellent way. The verses above follow that declaration. Paul is saying that no matter how gifted we are, love is an absolutely essential ingredient.

If we have a gift of heavenly or earthly languages but do not have love, the words will be just a bunch of noise. It is the love of God through the gift that powerfully affects lives. When you share with people you meet, if love is not the motivating power, not just love for God but God’s love for them as well, then your words will have little or no affect. It is the unconditional love of God for them that causes the words to grip their minds and hearts.

If you have a gift to hear what God would have you speak to others, and understand the mysteries in God’s word, and know a mountain of information about the work of God, it will be fruitless without love. Even if you have faith that can cause mountains to move, if love is not behind it, you really are nothing. Is this also telling us that there are those that have these great gifts that impress people, but their lives amount to nothing lasting?

There are many actions in the world that appear to be genuine goodness. Could a person actually give up their possessions and even their life and it not have the motivation of genuine love. Paul says, “Yes!” “Good” works gain us nothing if they are not done out of the love of God. The lesson is to seek to have our hearts overflowing with love so that the expressions of our gifts will bear fruit that lasts.

Remember: Is the genuine unselfish love of God motivating you?

**September 4 Morning**

Nehemiah 5:8-10 *8 and said: "As far as possible, we have bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your brothers, only for them to be sold back to us!" They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say. 9 So I continued, "What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? 10 I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop!*

During the time they were building the wall, some of the people came to Nehemiah and told him of their financial hardships. There had been a famine, and they had borrowed grain from their brothers. Those who loaned the grain were charging 1% interest, and in some cases, buying the sons and daughters of those in hardship as slaves. The people were giving up their fields to those to whom they owed the money, and that meant they could never repay and would only get deeper in debt.

When Nehemiah heard this he was angry. This is the anger of righteous indignation. They had bought back their people who were slaves to Gentiles to try and restore the nation, and now they were enslaving each other. Nehemiah asked them if what they have done was done in the fear of a just and righteous God. If not, then their Gentile neighbors could reproach them for their double standard. They were already being mocked for doing good. Why would they give them a chance to mock them for acts of hypocrisy? Nehemiah told them, “Lend freely, but don’t charge interest, and restore what you have taken from them!” The people agreed to do what was right.

This a message that needs to be declared today. The church should be known for its generosity to those in need. We need to set a standard for the world. Instead we often hear of the greedy Christian businessman who was a poor testimony. The unbelieving world reproaches us for not acting in the fear of God. If you are claiming to be a Christian and being unjust in your dealings with other Christians, you should restore what was taken unjustly. If your brother wrongs you, follow Matthew 18, but do not take your story to the world.

Consider: If we do not walk in the fear of God, why would the world want to hear our message?

**September 4 Evening**

1 Corinthians 15:51-54 *51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."*

Many in the early church began to worry about those believers who had died. (Sleep is a metaphor for death as in John 11.) They expected Christ to return before they died, just as many believers today have the same good expectation. Paul reassured them that when Christ returned, the dead would rise first and be given resurrection bodies. This was going to take place at the last trumpet. Some relate this to the last trumpet in Revelation, others to the last trumpet that called the Israelites to break camp and move during the wilderness wanderings.

We will be changed in a flash. Our mortal bodies will be transformed into immortal ones that can stand before the presence of our glorious God. Every believer’s soul and spirit will receive an incorruptible body similar to our Lord’s resurrected body. In this life, we age and decay so that we will long for our new heavenly bodies. It helps us break our ties with this earth and long for heaven.

Then we will experience victory over death. The victory Christ won for us will be evident in everything. We are journeying through this world in which the victory that Christ has won is not fully manifested. One day it will be manifested in our new bodies as well as our transformed souls. We physically ache with health conditions and spiritually ache because of sin. The victory of Christ will swallow up death. All the fruits of sin will be swallowed up by this victory. Do you see how glorious that Day will be?

Meditation: No wonder we are to long for it and pray, “Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus!”

**September 5 Morning**

Nehemiah 6:2-3 *2 Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono." But they were scheming to harm me; 3 so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?"*

The gaps in the wall around Jerusalem were filled, and the work was nearing completion. The workers were worn out, but they had to still hang the gates. The enemies tried one last desperate attempt to stop them. If they could pull their leader away from the city, they could kill him. Then they stood a much better chance of attacking the city and reopening the walls. After four invitations failed, they tried treachery. They sent an unsealed letter that declared that Nehemiah intended to make himself a king and revolt against Persia. They thought for sure that Nehemiah would come defend himself, but Nehemiah saw through their schemes. Finally they hired prophets to lie and counselors to cause Nehemiah to fear. Remember that the hand of God is upon Nehemiah. That makes all the difference.

Those in leadership in your church are often tempted when the work is nearing completion. It is then that they are most tempted with pride, most vulnerable to invitations from the enemy. Lies are just another tactic of the enemy to discourage and defeat the leader. The Devil is the father of lies. When all else fails, the enemy will inspire those from within to cause you to fear or invite you to sin. Pray for your leaders, especially when the work is going well. Pray that the hand of God be upon them to give them discernment. Pray that they will see through the plans of the enemy and not yield. Pray that they will see the great work they are doing and refuse to come down. Encourage them to stick it out until the work God has for them is completed.

Remember to pray for them that their hands will be strengthened for the work.

**September 5 Evening**

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 *3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.*

This could be the motto of chaplains and many other pastoral ministries, but it is for all Christians. Paul calls God the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort. Here is a wonderful difference between Christianity and most other faiths. The God of the Bible is compassionate. The so called gods of many other faiths are like those in Paul’s world, dispassionate and unconcerned. They merely demand obedience, submission, and worship. Our God is loving and compassionate. His desire for our submission comes from his compassion and love. To submit to Him is to find the best path for our lives.

He comforts us in all our troubles. No matter what we are enduring, we find that our Savior is there to encourage and direct us. Even when we are suffering because of our own sin, we find that He is there to comfort and guide us to victory. Then He encourages us to share that comfort with others who are in trouble. We take the comfort God has given us and share it with the world. The verse that He used to encourage you, you use to encourage others. That insight that blessed your soul, you use to bless another person. God sovereignly arranges you to meet people who are going through things like that which you have experienced.

We suffer for being Christians, for bearing his name, because our obedience causes us loss and abuse from the world. That is an overflow of the sufferings of Christ. We share in his sufferings because we endure things we otherwise would not endure if we were not obedient to Him. In the same way, we share the comfort we receive by being in Him. It is an overflow of the God of all comfort in our lives.

Remember: Watch for opportunities to let His comfort to you overflow into the lives of those He brings into your life.

**September 6 Morning**

Nehemiah 7:2 *2 I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do*.

Once the walls were completed and the gates hung, the enemies of Israel became discouraged because they realized the work was done with the help of God. (6:16) There were still spies within the city who regularly informed the enemies as to what was taking place. These enemies sent letters to Nehemiah to intimidate him, but now the walls are up and so is Israel’s confidence in the help of their God.

Nehemiah assigned his brother Hanani, along with Hananiah, to be in charge of the city. The reason that he was chosen was because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do. Do you know someone like that? They are careful to obey the law even in areas most people consider unimportant. They are quick to make any offense right with others. They spend time in the Word, but are humble about their knowledge of it. They fear God more than most men do. If you need someone to be trusted in situations most might compromise, you would want this person. You know they won’t compromise, for they fear God more than most men do.

And how about you? Do you fear God more than most? Are you a person of integrity because you know the justice of God, that it is not possible to do wrong and escape His justice in the consequences for evil? You know your sins are covered by the blood of Jesus, but is your sense of His justice still a motivating factor in your life? The Apostle Paul asked if we should sin that grace would look more wonderful by contrast. Of course not! (Romans 6:1,2) Sin still has consequences in this life and God still disciplines the children that he loves.

Remember: A person of great integrity fears God more than most men do.

**September 6 Evening**

2 Corinthians 2:14-16 *14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. 15 For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?*

When the Roman army conquered a region, the commander would return to Rome for a triumphal procession. The captives and their treasures would be paraded down the main street of Rome so that all could see. Paul says we are always being led like captives. There is a great difference. Those led by the Roman army were sadly going into servitude or death. We are going joyfully into servitude and death.

Our Captor is none other than the King of kings. His intentions are for our good.

The king we once served under was brutal. In some cases, it was the same with Rome. The people saw captivity to Rome as a better situation than the regime they lived under. Our situation is infinitely better. We go with great joy because we know the good intentions of the heart of our Captor. We call Him our Liberator, our Redeemer.

As we are led, we spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Him. Sometimes those watching the procession do not know of His great heart and fear being taken captive. They catch that scent of the knowledge of Him, but it smells like death to them. Others catch the fragrance and smell life. The perishing smell death. Those that are being saved smell life. Are you led captive, spreading that fragrance?

What a task we have! Sometimes we look like we are going into hard servitude.

We certainly shouldn’t. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Does the audience smell the fragrance of life as you pass? Do they see the joy of serving Christ, or a whining servant that is thinking of returning to Egypt?

Consider: Only Christ can make us equal to the task of spreading His delightful fragrance.

**September 7 Morning**

Nehemiah 8:8-10 *8 They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read. 9 Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. 10 Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."*

Once the people dealt with the sin in their lives, they asked Ezra to read from the Book of the Law. When he opened the book they all stood. Ezra began by praising God. All the people lifted their hands and joined in agreement that God was great, and then they bowed and worshipped. You’ll find this natural order of things throughout Scripture. We come into His presence with thanksgiving and praise. Then we are drawn to worship in adoration, because we are undeserving of all His goodness.

Then Ezra began to read as the Levites spread throughout the congregation to help explain the word that was read. Ezra may have been reading in Hebrew as the Levites translated into Aramaic. Conviction of sin settled on the crowd as the Word was read, and they wept. The Word exposed the sin in their hearts and actions, and they were repentant of their past response to all of God’s goodness in their lives.

They could see how gracious it was of God to allow the nation to be restored. But this was a time to rejoice. The walls were completed. The city was safe, and God had shown that His gracious hand was upon them. They had already dealt with sin in their midst. They had made restitution for their sins. Now it was time to celebrate. They were tired from a long stretch of hard labor. The Levites told them not to wallow in the past and the sins that they had already repented of. Now it was time to celebrate the goodness of God! When God really deals with us, and we come clean about our real condition, deal with the places we are not right with Him, then we need to move from grief to joy. The joy of the Lord is our strength to live in new life. Forgetting what is behind, we press forward in joy for all that God has done and is doing. Rejoice in His forgiveness. To wallow in past sins makes you ineffective in your new life. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. Rejoice in the Lord always!

Consider: If in any area of your life that you are not right with God, repent, make the necessary changes, and then move from sorrow to joy because you are now right with God. The world needs to see the joy and peace that we have when we understand we are right with God.

**September 7 Evening**

2 Corinthians 3:6,17-18 *6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

*17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

In this chapter, Paul shares a comparison of the fading glory of the old covenant and the surpassing glory of the new covenant that transforms the hearts of men. He has asked, “Who is up to the task of spreading the fragrant knowledge of Christ?” Then He says that we are, for the new covenant brings the life of Christ that enables us. The Spirit imbues us with His very life. The old regulations just pointed out sin and, therefore, sentences us to death.

The Spirit is the very presence of the Lord in us! He gives us the freedom to obey His voice and not the hard fast rule. He can interpret the Spirit of the Word to us instead of being bound by strict legalistic interpretations. We are free from the chains of regulated behavior to obey the Spirit in a given situation.

As we look to the Lord for direction and instruction, we reflect His glory. Instead of the cold dead rules, we act in the Spirit that brings life. In doing so, we look more and more like Him. The attributes that are His are expressed through us, so that people increasingly see the glory of the Lord in our life. That is not our work, but the work of His Spirit within us. The more we look to Him and walk in communion with Him, the more people see the likeness of Christ in us.

Consider: Does this describe your life? Are you being changed with ever-increasing glory? If not, perhaps you are not looking constantly to His Spirit but to the letter. Even in Christianity today there are those who look to the hard, cold letter instead of the Spirit of the Lord. Let His Spirit interpret the letter in a given situation and point you to the Scripture He would apply. Keep looking to Him expectantly for direction and instruction.

**September 8 Morning**

Nehemiah 9:3 *3 They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God*.

After celebrating the Feast of Booths, the people gathered again to hear the Word read to them and to finish confessing their sins. The prayer in Nehemiah 9 is a summary of the history of Israel. It begins with recognizing God for His greatness, that He is the Creator, and that all things come from Him. They continued with their own history of being called by God and delivered from Egypt, kept and fed in the wilderness, and given God’s directions for living, for their good. Yet they had refused to listen. They recounted their forefathers’ evil deeds of idol making and turning their back on God. Still, they were assisted by God in the conquest of their enemies. They acknowledged their ungrateful response to all that God had done.

In the midst of abundance and prosperity, they again turned from God, ignored the prophets’ warnings, and rebelled against God. God allowed enemies to conquer them and hardship to overtake them. Finally they turned back to God. The cycle continued until they were taken into captivity. All through the prayer, they extolled the wonderful attributes of God’s mercy, grace, love and justice.

We could pray a similar prayer. May I suggest to you that you write out a prayer acknowledging all that God has done in your life and how you have responded? Don’t forget to fill it with the attributes of God’s mercy, grace, love and justice. If you need ideas, read Nehemiah 9. It seems the heart of man never changes. When we have an abundance of blessing, we turn from God and go our own way until the hard times are allowed to return. Then we ask God, “Why?” Only when we surrender to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit will we break this cycle, so that the LORD can bless us and the blessings not capture our hearts.

Consider: Take a moment to write out your own Nehemiah 9.

**September 8 Evening**

2 Corinthians 4:7,10-11 *7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*

*10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.*

Gideon’s men were told to put a torch inside a clay pot to hide the light until they had surrounded the enemy. Then, when the bugle sounded, they were to break their pots and the light would shine out. God has done something very similar in us. He has placed His Spirit in us. When we are broken vessels, the light shines forth. It isn’t about the clay pot. It is about the light that is inside. The pot has no power of its own. We are just a vessel for the light. Our greatest need is to remain broken.

You might call us crackpots for Jesus.

Put in another metaphor, we are to be dead so that others can see the life of Jesus revealed in our body. If we remain in the death of Jesus, that is to keep our old nature on the cross, then the resurrected life of Jesus can be seen in our lives. We desire for others to see Jesus as we let His life reign in us. Broken pot or old self on the cross, we must get out of the way. Then our mortal bodies express the love, joy, peace, and all the fruits of the Spirit. Those who are drawn to Christ will see Him in our life. What an amazing thing! The old hymn says, “Let others see Jesus in me. Let others see Jesus in me. In life and play and work each day, let others see

Jesus in me.”

Is the life of Jesus manifested in your mortal body? If you have Him as the treasure in your jar of clay, the only thing that can keep Him hidden is refusal to keep the old nature on the cross, refusal to be broken. Insisting on our own life will hide the light and life of Jesus. I sometimes imagine what it would be like if Jesus were to secretly return and walk among us. He does, in lives that are willing vessels, broken, and dead to their old nature.

Consider: Will the world see Jesus today in your mortal body?

**September 9 Morning**

Nehemiah 10:28-29 *28 "The rest of the people--priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand-- 29 all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord.*

After the people had confessed their sins and repented, they took the difficult step of making things right with God. Then they went one step further. They took an oath. They realized how easily they slid back into the ways that destroyed the nation before, so they took an oath binding themselves with a curse if they broke it. The oath begins with the very things they had been most likely to compromise, marrying heathen wives, trade on the Sabbath, and not keeping the seventh year release of debts and rest for the land.

We know the areas in our lives where we are most likely to compromise. It is usually in the same areas that Israel had problems, sex and money. They got serious about their weaknesses. They pledged together that if any of them went down that road again they would be justly cursed. How serious are you about sin in your life? Is it enough to make it very costly to do so? They took the curse quite seriously. They had seen the pain and devastation sin caused and said, “If we go there, we deserve what we reap.” Have you observed the price of sin in your life? Have you really tallied up the cost of rebellion against the Holy Spirit? I’m not suggesting you take an oath unless you are led to, but I am suggesting you deal with your flesh tendency to go back down that road of compromise.

Most of the rest of the oath had to do with financial obligations to the Temple and the commitment to keep the worship ministry alive and well. We have the same obligations in a spiritual sense. The temple is the family of God. Are we caring in love for the body of Christ, or ignoring one another’s needs? Are our gatherings for worship as He commanded, “worship in spirit and in truth”?

Consider: Once you repent of sin and make restitution, go the next step. Ask the Lord to show you a deterrent to keep you from going down that road again.

**September 9 Evening**

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 *16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

The Apostle is saying this because, through his team’s ministry, more and more people were experiencing the grace of God. That in turn was showing off the wonderful attributes of God. Even though they died to their own self-life day after day, they knew that when they were raised from the dead, it would all be more than worth it. They had an eternal perspective. Knowing this caused them to not lose heart in the midst of physical adversity. The outward was wasting away, but inwardly there was daily renewal.

That sacrifice was earning them eternal reward. He calls the sacrifice “light and momentary”. If being shipwrecked, overnight in the ocean, beaten and left for dead, scourged with whips, in stocks in jail and much more is “light and momentary,” then what are the little things you and I go through?

How did Paul endure all that? He kept his vision on the unseen. He focused on the eternal glory that would far outweigh what he was presently experiencing. He knew that if you put these temporary troubles on one side and eternal reward on the other, the scale would tip so hard and fast that troubles would be launched into orbit! His focus was the unseen. That is faith, and faith pleases God.

The visible is temporary. The unseen is eternal. That alone should give us a point of reference, a reality check, for whatever we endure in this life. Whatever you are going through today, remember, it is temporary. Don’t lose heart.

Consider: Are your eyes fixed on the unseen? Have you considered how immeasurably the unseen outweighs the visible? What are you laboring for?

**September 10 Morning**

Nehemiah 12:44, 46-47 *44 At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits and tithes. From the fields around the towns they were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites, for Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites… 46 For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the singers and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. 47 So in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, all Israel contributed the daily portions for the singers and gatekeepers. They also set aside the portion for the other Levites, and the Levites set aside the portion for the descendants of Aaron*.

The wall was finished and the people had made an oath to be faithful to God. Now was the time to rejoice. They took a break during their repentance to celebrate the feast of booths, remembering what God had done. Now, after hearing the Law read and making an oath to keep it, they were celebrating God’s current mercy and favor. We need to remember God’s favor shown us in the past as well as His present mercy and goodness.

The leaders of Judah and two large choirs marched around the top of the walls of Jerusalem going in opposite directions, singing praise and thanksgiving to God.

They celebrated joyfully. Our services of worship should include these times of joyful worship for present victories.

The people were pleased with the ministry of the priests and Levites, so they brought their firstfruits and tithes. When houses of worship minister according to the Word of the Lord, there should be sufficient offerings without coaxing the people to give.

Everyone was in their assigned place of service as God had intended. Directors of music and the singers, the gatekeepers and Levites who took care of the House of God, all received a portion from the tithes so that they could focus on ministering to the LORD. We think of ministry to the people, but we forget about ministry to the LORD. In our present day, this is being revived in places as songs of praise and worship are sung around the clock.

Consider: What is your ministry to the LORD? How can we see that ministry to the Lord continues?

**September 10 Evening**

2 Corinthians 5:7-8, 10 *7 We live by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

Paul was so confident of what awaited him that his daily life was focused on the unseen. He would rather have left his body behind and gone to the presence of the glorified Christ than to have remained on this earth. His daily decisions, his goals and dreams, and even his thought life were all fixed on the unseen. He lived by faith.

Why was he so fixated on what was to come, on the unseen world? He knew that every soul would have to stand before the judgment seat. Many Christians do not understand that there will be a review of their lives just like that of the rest of the world. The difference is that when our lives are reviewed, the sin that is covered by the blood of Christ will not come up. It is washed away. Yet, what we have done with this life will be the basis of what we receive. What we did with Christ will determine our eternal dwelling place. What we did with His life in us will determine what is due us. God keeps books. Every good work is of His Spirit, and yet, He rewards us for our cooperation.

Paul had such a treasure waiting for him that he was willing to go at any time. He was glad to stay and continue to invest in eternity but more desirous to leave and be with Jesus.

Consider: Are you living by faith or by sight? What are your decisions, goals, dreams, and even your thoughts based on? Is it the things you can see or the eternal unseen world? Have you so invested your life that you long to go and be where your treasure is?

**September 11 Morning**

Nehemiah 13:9-11 *9 I gave orders to purify the rooms, and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God, with the grain offerings and the incense. 10 I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them, and that all the Levites and singers responsible for the service had gone back to their own fields. 11 So I rebuked the officials and asked them, "Why is the house of God neglected?" Then I called them together and stationed them at their posts*.

Nehemiah had to return to Persia for an extended time. When he was given permission and returned to Jerusalem, he was shocked. Politics had already entered the Temple worship. One of the priests was related to Tobiah, an enemy of Jerusalem and a leader of opposition. This connection got Tobiah a room in the Temple itself. When Nehemiah returned, that priest had already been expelled but no one knew what to do about Tobiah’s things. Nehemiah did! He threw them out into the street and commanded the room to be cleansed and the Temple treasures restored.

What a picture of our hearts! We sometimes have a little connection with the world. Before we know it, the world moves in and fills up one of the rooms. Just like in Jerusalem, worship begins to be neglected. The Jews had stopped supporting the singers and gatekeepers so they all went to work somewhere else. Once the world moves in, we start giving praise to other things. Our giving to the work of God begins to dwindle, and worship suffers. No one is guarding the gates and all kinds of other compromises begin to sneak in.

“Why is the house of God neglected?” That is to say, why have you allowed this backsliding of your spiritual condition? We occasionally need this kind of a rebuke to help us see how far we have fallen. When we hear it, we need to restore things as they were. Put things in their proper places.

Admonition: Return to worship as we know God would have it, in spirit and in truth.

**September 11 Evening**

2 Corinthians 5:15-17 *15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

Paul declared that it was the love of Christ that motivated and directed him. He no longer lived for himself but for the One who died for him and was raised again. He declared that this should be the normal Christian life. We should all be living for the One who died for us, not for self.

Do you view others as having eternal significance or temporary influence? I believe Paul is saying that, at first, the disciples did not understand that Jesus was their Creator. They thought of Him only as a potential Messiah that would set up an earthly kingdom. Are we looking at people in the same way? Do we see them for the potential they have to do something for us, how they can help us achieve temporal goals? Or do we see others as the sons and daughters of God that He has called them to be?

What a change this would make in the way we relate to one another! Instead of making decisions as to what is temporarily good for us, we should make them on what is good for the growth and development of the new creation that they are. That is living for Christ. That is making the decisions on the basis of what is good for the Kingdom of God. Our brothers and sisters are no longer pawns of the enemy, but have become royalty. We should treat one another that way.

Do our eyes of faith see what God is making of one another? If so, we can love one another with His love. We can be patient and bear with the passing weaknesses, knowing that they are patiently bearing with us. The work that God has begun will be completed. Look past the transitory and see the finished work. God does when He looks at you, and aren’t you glad!

Remember: Do unto others as you would have them do to you.

**September 12 Morning**

Esther 4:14-16 *14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" 15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."*

Mordecai’s fellow Jews must have wondered how he could justify sending his stepdaughter to try out for queen of Persia. After all, the King was not a believer. The sovereign hand of God had placed her just where she needed to be when the Jews came under attack. We know Mordecai was not a compromising individual for he would not bow to Haman and that was the source of the threat toward the Jews. Haman was a close friend of the King. The King ordered everyone to bow before him because of his position, but Jews do not bow to men.

This made Haman furious. When he found out Mordecai was a Jew, he wanted all Jews exterminated. He convinced the King to issue the decree. The King did not know his new queen was a Jew. Mordecai and many of the Jews fasted and prayed that God would deliver them. When Esther saw Mordecai was dressed in sackcloth, she had a messenger find out what was wrong. Mordecai asked her to plead the case before the King. If she went into his presence without being summoned, she could be executed. Mordecai told her she would be executed anyway, just for being Jewish. She asked the Jews to all fast and pray for her for three days and then she went in to see the King. She had decided that if she was executed it would be for a just cause. How could she live with herself if she did not try to save her people?

We could use some of her desperation. We often fear sharing the salvation message because we think we might be rejected, but we are sharing with them to save their souls. The life of a nation was at stake. We are not so fearful of losing our lives, but we do face rejection. We have to say, “If we are rejected then we are rejected.” People still need to know the truth. God placed Esther where she was to serve a purpose. He has placed you where you are also. Your friends and acquaintances are not in your life by accident.

Consider: When God opens the door, share, and don’t worry about the consequences. Lives are at stake. God has placed you where you are for such a time as this!

**September 12 Evening**

2 Corinthians 5:18,20-21 *18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:*

*20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Paul has been writing about the wonder of Christ transforming our lives and preparing us for eternity. He knew he had laid up his treasure there and would prefer to leave and be with Christ. Now he adds that this is all from God. It is not his work but Christ in him. We are sent to help people find a right relationship with God. As we share the work of Christ and encourage them to surrender to His love, we all become ministers of reconciliation. The damage that was done through Adam and our own choices must be reconciled if we are to spend eternity in His presence.

That is why we are Christ’s ambassadors. The word is literally “elders”, but the context shows that “ambassadors” was a good choice of words. We go out representing God, making His appeal to man. We plead with people, imploring them to be made right with God.

It is such an incredible offer! There is a heavenly ledger of debt and credit in every life. Sin adds to the debt side. When we first hear God’s offer through one of His servants, we realize we only come with debts, insurmountable ones at that. He shows us the ledger of Christ. He has no debts, but His credit page is full, credit beyond our imagination, the righteousness of God. Then he offers to change the names on the ledger, yours for Jesus of Nazareth. Yes, He will take your huge debts, and in return, give you His ledger of incredible credit. Blind to the reality of sins destructiveness, some will reject the offer. They realize that in the exchange, they will become a new creation with a new Master. They look back at their debt producing bondage and find some pleasure in it. Will you take the offer?

Remember: You are an ambassador. Share the wonderful process of reconciliation.

**September 13 Morning**

Esther 6:1-3 *1 That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. 2 It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. 3 "What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?" the king asked. "Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered*.

The queen took the chance and entered to speak to the king. He extended his scepter, which meant she could have an audience and not die. Instead of telling all, she asked the king and Haman (see September 26) to a banquet. As Haman left he saw Mordecai in sackcloth, still refusing to bow to him. Haman asked his relatives what to do, and they suggested a building a gallows and asking for the king’s permission to hang Mordecai on it.

The hand of providence intervened that night in the form of insomnia. Nothing is so boring as the official records, so the King decided to read those. He came across the record of Mordecai uncovering a plot on the King’s life. What a coincidence! Haman was in the courtyard waiting for the King to get up. The King called him in and asked for suggestions as to what to do for the man the king honors. Haman thought he was the one about whom the king was speaking, so he suggested an elaborate procession with the highest official leading it. Haman ended up leading Mordecai through the streets. The Jews knew now that the God of Israel was helping Mordecai and that Haman was ruined.

The next day Haman was brought to the banquet and his plans were exposed. The King was very upset, but when the King returned and saw him on the queen’s couch pleading for his life, he was furious and had Haman hung on the gallows Haman intended for Mordecai. Since the former edict to attack the Jews couldn’t be rescinded, the King issued a new edict saying the Jews could defend themselves. The day they were to be attacked, they attacked their enemies. Because Mordacai was now the highest official, many of the leaders sided with the Jews. In this way, the holiday of Purim was established.

Did Mordacai then have anyone criticizing his decision to have Esther become queen? Can anyone doubt the hand of God through it all, preserving His people and bringing His will to pass?

Consider: The same amazing hand of God is at work in your life to bring about His purposes for your good!

**September 13 Evening**

2 Corinthians 6:16-18 *16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will*

*be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."*

Paul ran together a string of phrases from the Old Testament, yet He picked up the Spirit behind them all. He was pleading with the Corinthians to be separated from the world they lived in. While Paul and his companions laid down their lives, the Corinthians seemed to be living it up. While Paul and company loved from their hearts and spoke openly and honestly, the Corinthians withheld their affection in a calculated way.

The disparity in their love was from a love for the world. He asked them to look at these promises of God. They were supposed to be the temple of the living God. They had the promise that He would live with them and walk among them. God promised to make them His own people. So, be separated! Don’t be defiled by the world. Don’t let sin constantly infect your life. Be wholly God’s, and He will be your Father, and you will be His sons and daughters. It is not just the God of someone’s imagination who says this, but the Lord Almighty. This is the God of all creation making these promises. This is the God that has the power to make it happen.

Until they cut off their love for the things of the world, Paul couldn’t see them loving others with the love of Christ. If you are not able to love God’s servants wholeheartedly, this may be a warning to you. Consider God’s promises and how you should respond. Paul said that the proper response was to purify ourselves by perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. Go on from salvation to sanctification. Don’t be satisfied with just being saved, let God transform your heart, mind, and every area of your life. It is only then that you will be able to love others in a truly unselfish way.

Consider: Is my love for the world keeping me from loving my brothers and sisters in Christ?

**September 14 Morning**

Job 1:8-11 *8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." 9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. 10 "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."*

Job is the earliest of all the literature in the Bible. The sin that was most feared was cursing God, even if it was not spoken aloud. The book begins by describing Job as the greatest man of the East, and tells us that he was blameless. We know that all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory, so we should consider this to be a statement relative to his culture. However, God commended him as one of the most righteous men upon the earth.

The scene changes to the halls of heaven. Satan (which means the Accuser) had been roaming the earth. God brought up the subject of Job and his righteousness. Satan suggested that it was only because of the abundance of wealth and protection from evil that caused Job to act in a righteous manner. In other words, his heart was not righteous, he was just never tempted sufficiently. Satan suggested that if God took away Job’s possessions and he would commit that unpardonable sin of cursing God, “even curse You to your face.” The heavenly forces are battling over the souls of men.

We can learn many things from this ancient narrative. God does put a hedge about us. Satan was complaining about that because he is the Destroyer. In the spiritual realms you can be sure your adversary is accusing you before God. He must have permission to destroy the possessions of those under God’s care. What assurance this should bring us, knowing that the only time the Adversary can get through that hedge is at God’s permission. It will either turn us back to God, or it will bring us to a closer walk with Him. It will testify to the heavenly realms that the fallen angels have made the wrong choice.

Remember: You are the subject of a heavenly battle. Stay faithful!

**September 14 Evening**

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 *6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

In all the New Testament, this is the one passage that speaks the most clearly to a principle of giving. The converts gave all that they had in the time that followed Pentecost. As the evangelists went out to convert other regions, we don’t see the same forsaking of all their possessions. They are now free from the confines of the Law, so they are not even required to give according to the Law’s instruction. What is the new standard or guideline for giving?

When the church in Jerusalem went through a difficult time of famine, the other churches took up a collection for them. The Apostle Paul told them that their abundance should make up for the lack in Jerusalem. Then he gave them an eternal principle to go by. If you only plant a little seed, you only reap a small harvest, but if you plant an abundance of seeds you will reap bountifully. What you put in is what you get out. Investing in the Kingdom of God is not something that returns small dividends. Don’t limit yourself to a percentage.

Everyone should give as they have decided in their heart. The grace of God will work in your heart to produce good works. Paul wasn’t worried about whether or not they would give. He did want them to be prepared when they came to make the collection, but he was not worried about the individual’s gift. He trusted the Holy Spirit to work on each heart. The Spirit not only helps us know how much to give, but helps us have a generous and joyful spirit in giving. If you have to twist arms to get others to give, it is not pleasing to God. God loves a cheerful giver, not a coerced one.

Consider: Has the Holy Spirit been working on your heart to give to your church, a needy family, or a ministry? Do so generously in Jesus’ name and you will generously be blessed.

**September 15 Morning**

Job 1:20-22 *20 At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship 21 and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." 22 In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing*

We can scarcely imagine all that calamity striking in one day, though some readers will no doubt have experienced the one thing that was dearest to them taken. Losing all is losing all regardless if it is little or much. Surely Job’s greatest loss was that of his children. To lose even one child is worse than imaginable. How do you react to adversity?

When we read Job’s reaction, we see that God was correct in His assessment of Job. I’ve never seen anyone react without even a “Why God?” Job will come to that later. If you are wondering why Satan allowed his wife to live, it is because she told him to curse God and die. It was about to get even worse, as Satan does not wish to admit defeat and longed to turn Job against God.

Job’s response was to worship. His answer is quoted at funerals, but it should be considered throughout our lives. We came into the world without physical things and we will leave without them. There has never been a moving van following a casket. The Egyptians tried, but all those treasures sit in museums. If our children go first, we will meet them one day, but our earthly treasures will go to others. Praise the name of the LORD. Praise Him for His wisdom in bringing us to the things that last and separating us from the temporal. How attached are you to the things that you will leave behind?

Consider: When we have a realization of the little value of earthly things, it is much easier to share them with others at the leading of God.

**September 15 Evening**

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 *3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

The world wages war against physical locations and troops. Those who belong to Christ fight a different battle. Jesus told Pilate that if His kingdom was of the world, His servants would be physically fighting (John 18:36). The Kingdom of Christ is in the heart, in the spirit. There are territories and enemies in the spirit that must be taken.

Paul tells us that we have divine weapons that are powerful enough to demolish strongholds. He goes on to describe what those strongholds are. Arguments, pretense set against the knowledge of God, and thoughts can all be strongholds in which the enemy takes cover. A stronghold is a defensive position. The children of God are on the offense. Since Jesus conquered death, the enemy has been cowering in these strongholds. How people cling to one sham of an argument after another! When their life is on the line, they drop them all and run to God, but when the Holy Spirit is gently knocking, the argument stronghold keeps Him out.

That is when we come in as servants of Christ and use our divine weapons to break down the strongholds. Our weapons are the same as the fruits of the Spirit. Love conquers all. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world. We attack every thought that rises up against the knowledge of God, whether in another’s life or our own.

Conquering our thought life with the fruit of self-discipline results in a major victory. Once our thoughts are made to obey Christ, our actions will follow. All the fruits of the Spirit are from the life of the Holy Spirit who indwells us.

Remember: As we yield to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, the strongholds come tumbling down.

**September 16 Morning**

Job 2:4-5, 10 *4 "Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life. 5 But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face."*

*10 He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said*.

After Job lost everything but his wife and yet retained his integrity, God asked Satan if he was now convinced of Job’s love for God. Satan told God that any man would curse God if his health were taken from him. God gave permission to take his health but not his life. Job was afflicted with boils head to foot. He used a piece of broken pot to scrape the boils.

Then his wife told him it was not worth it to try to remain right with God, “just curse Him and die.” Sometimes we get poor advice from a spouse because they don’t want to see us suffer. Eternity is of much greater value than temporal relief from pain. Job answered her with an expression that we would do well to consider, “Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” Is God only aloud to be Santa Claus? Can He never have a reason to bring difficulty? Will we be so brazen as to say that we know better than God what is needed in our life? We thank Him for the things we perceive to be good, but should we not thank Him for trouble, knowing He has allowed it for a purpose?

Job did not sin with his mouth. His heart may have been beginning to question, but his testimony remained solid. Here too, we can take a tip from Job. Be most careful of what you express to others during difficult times. We can teach them to have faith in God, or to doubt God. Our response is a witness that can encourage faith or doubt. It is at these times that we are most tempted to let the wrong expressions slip from our lips as we seek sympathy from those around us. We want them to feel our pain.

Remember: No one feels our pain like our Great High Priest, Jesus. Take your expressions of pain to Him in prayer. His Holy Spirit is the Comforter.

**September 16 Evening**

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 *13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.*

Paul had an intense passion for the churches he founded. By this time in church history, false teachers were making their rounds trying to push certain false doctrines. From the passage we can learn several things about them. They carried an air of authority. They were demanding, abusive and took great pride in their Jewish lineage and education. They were trained speakers that demanded support, but their teaching was a lie.

The Corinthian church had not hung onto the teaching of their founder, Paul. These false teachers were probably the Judaizers, insisting that the Gentiles converts keep the rigid demands of the Law. It can apply to any false teaching that emphasizes anything other than what Christ has done for us. We are so easily swayed by powerful preaching and teaching, and so readily let go of the fundamental truths we have learned from Scripture.

Paul gives us a powerful warning. It does not matter how the speaker appears. Appearances are deceiving. Satan masquerades as an angel of light. Of course the counterfeit looks powerfully spiritual. See with your spiritual eyes and not the physical ones. Look past the dazzle to the substance and see if it lines up with the redemptive work of Jesus through the cross, resurrection and ascension.

Peter also warned of these false teachers. He said their motivation was greed and lust (2 Peter 2:1-3). Paul and Peter agreed that they were soon to receive the judgment they deserve. How can we spot them? Listen carefully to the substance. Watch the fruit of their lives. It will not be the fruit of the Spirit. Anyone can claim to be called to preach and teach, but only a transformed life will have the obvious fruits of the Spirit.

Remember: Ask yourself if the speaker is in accord with the Word and demonstrating the fruits of the Spirit.

**September 17 Morning**

Job 9:2-4 *2 "Indeed, I know that this is true. But how can a mortal be righteous before God? 3 Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand. 4 His wisdom is profound, his power is vast.*

*Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?*

Job’s friends came to comfort him, and sat silent for seven days. What can you say to a friend who has endured such loss? Finally Job spoke of his misery. He wished he had been stillborn. He considered his pain greater than the joys he experienced in life. Good people may experience situations in which they despair of life itself.

Then his friends made an all too common mistake. They tried to counsel him in his grief. One insisted that he must have sinned. Job replied that he was not aware of any specific sin, and if he did not intend to sin, wouldn’t God find mercy to forgive. The other friend insisted no one is perfect before God. Our verse today is Job’s reply. Of course we are not perfect in his sight. How can anyone be righteous before God? If we were to have a debate with God, we couldn’t really respond to any of God’s questions. No one can stand before the Almighty and say He has not been righteous in all His acts.

Still Job did not understand what he was going through. Why should all this trouble be allowed to strike him? He could not see the heavenly conflict or understand how good would come from such suffering. It will be another 30 chapters before his eyes are opened and he submits quietly to the sovereignty of God. What can we learn from this passage today? Sometimes the best thing is to say nothing, but weep with those that weep. There will be times in our lives that we have no explanation for suffering. Endure, and believe that God is working all things out for the good of those that love Him and are called according to His purpose. There are times when we are teaching angelic beings about love for God and trust in His character and sovereignty. Satan refused to believe Job could continue to have faith in God, but Job proved him wrong. Though he voiced the fact that he did not understand what God was doing, he never doubted the integrity of God.

Consider: You don’t have to understand what is happening, but you do need keep trusting God.

**September 17 Evening**

2 Corinthians 12:7-9 *7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*

When a speaker comes and insists on sharing a long litany of his accomplishments, publications, and degrees, you can be fairly certain they are not relying on the Holy Spirit. When Paul compared himself to the false teachers that were trying to draw the Corinthians away from the truths Paul taught, Paul said it was his weaknesses that were worth boasting about, not strengths.

He had seen revelations that could not be repeated, so to keep him from thinking too highly about himself, God gave him an affliction of some kind. We don’t know what it was, but here it is called a thorn in the flesh and a messenger of Satan. He said that it tormented him. Praying three different times for deliverance from it did not help. Eventually he heard from God, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*

Sometimes God does not deliver us from our suffering but gives us the grace to endure it. That can be a more powerful testimony of God at work in us than if we were to be healed. You probably know someone that lives with hardship and yet does so graciously, even helping others in the process. That says more about the power of God in their life than if they were to be healed. Some insist that all people are to be healed. This case of Paul shows us that is not always true.

Paul had to have such power from God for his ministry that only an affliction could keep him from pride. Paul’s response to his situation was to boast about the weakness so that the power could rest on him. He would prefer to have the power of God in his life and be weak than to be in full health and not be used as mightily by God. Which would you prefer?

Consider: If it came down to a choice, would you choose health or the power of God on your ministry?

**September 18 Morning**

Job 14:14-15 *14 If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait for my renewal to come. 15 You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made*.

Job continued to proclaim his innocence, and his friends continued to insist that he had to have some secret fault. At first, Job said no one can stand before God and if God gave man an audience, man would not be able to speak. Later, however, he asked if there could not be some mediator. There is a Mediator that will stand between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

In the middle of Job’s complaint, he spoke the words of the passage for today. Though the people of Job’s time did not believe in the afterlife, Job uttered these words in a way that fit with New Testament theology. Job’s earlier words show he saw death as an end of being, and so we interpret the change here to mean his healing and restoration. “Will man live after death?” In the light of the New Testament we answer “Yes!” to his question. Our days upon earth are hard service, but our transformation, our metamorphosis, is coming. God will call with the sound of the Last Trump, and we will answer. He will long for the creatures His hands have made. The Son will come to receive His bride, and the marriage feast will begin.

Since the Holy Spirit crafted the words, we have the wonderful hope hidden within Job’s imperfect understanding. In spite of the difficulties we face in life and the tests that God allows to come our way, we have the hope of our transformation and the call of God to those He longs for. Cling to your hope through times of trial.

Encouragement: Set your sights on eternity with Him! You will be renewed!

**September 18 Evening**

Galatians 1:4,9-10 *…Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! 10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

Paul had to encourage the churches that he founded to stay true to the Gospel that he first preached to them. In this introduction of his letter to the Galatians, he tells them that it was not something he made up. He was throwing Christians in jail before he was confronted by Christ. This Gospel is the real thing, so don’t let people or even an angel tell you otherwise. Paul will later explain that the other gospel being preached has to do with trying to please God by keeping the rules of the Law. Paul knew it was all about grace given to us through what Jesus did for us. He gives His own experience as a verification of that fact.

He sums up the Gospel in verse 4. Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins. He took our punishment. He paid it all. Not only does that make us right with God, but it also rescues us from this present evil age. Many seek salvation from judgment but don’t see the need to be rescued from their present depravity. They don’t see it as depravity. Living a self-centered life apart from God is thumbing your nose at your Creator. It is telling God that your will comes first. It is insisting that you remain god of your life. He gave Himself for our sin, but true deliverance from sin also delivers us from the present evil age.

Finally, Paul insisted that what he is telling the Galatians was an effort to be faithful to God. He could just go along with men who insist on teaching a corrupt gospel, but that would make him a servant of men and not of Christ. He was willing to go against the flow, take the persecution, and stand up and be different because he was Christ’s servant. Pleasing men rather than God is compromise.

Remember: When faced with pleasing men or staying true to the Gospel of grace, we should stay true to God no matter what the cost may be.

**September 19 Morning**

Job 19:25-27 *25 I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; 27 I myself will see him with my own eyes--I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*

Job’s friends continued to insist that Job face up to the sin that had caused his miserable condition. Job continues to tell them he can’t find one. Of course he was not perfect, nor is anyone. He couldn’t find an issue to repent of. There are times when we suffer the consequences of other’s sins. There are times when there may be a heavenly battle over us, such as this case with Job. What did Job cling to through it all? What kept him from following his wife’s advice and cursing God? He trusted in the perfect character of God.

He knew that God was his Redeemer. That is the Gospel. Though these ancient people had only oral tradition to go on, Job knew God was his Redeemer. He also knew that one day his Redeemer would physically stand upon the earth. Even though he died and rotted away, he believed he would see that day. He longed for it, because then he knew he would then understand what it was all about.

You may have sorrow in your life that you cannot find the reason or plan of God in your present circumstance. You can’t see any good that comes from it. Do as Job did and put your hope in the day when you will see God. God will ever be perfect and just. You can be sure that there are reasons for all things, and that they are good reasons. He is sovereign over all. Evil is not without boundaries. All things will have meaning and purpose. Place your hope in the day you will see Him face to face and all your questions answered.

Consider: Your Redeemer lives. Does your heart yearn for that day?

**September 19 Evening**

Galatians 2:19-21 *19 For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"*

When Peter came to Antioch, he laid aside his strict Jewish customs and ate with the Gentile Christians. Later, when men were sent there from James, Peter ate only with the Jews for fear of being reprimanded by the law keepers. Other Jews followed his example. Paul confronted him, reminding him that they were made right with God through faith in Christ Jesus, not in keeping the law. They received the Spirit because of faith in Jesus, not because they kept the law.

Paul went on to explain that it was through the law that he died to the law so that he might live for God. The law promised a new covenant and the indwelling Spirit of God. The law promised the coming Messiah who would reign in our hearts. Paul died with that Messiah, Jesus, on the cross. His life was the life of Christ in him. He lived that life not by the law, but by faith in the Son of God who loved him and gave Himself for him. It was no longer Paul trying to obey rules, but Paul yielded to the life of Christ in him. The righteous things he did were not his effort, but the life of Christ manifested in his mortal body.

Many Christians today try to please God by doing the things that good Christians should do. It is not so different from the Jews trying to please God by keeping the Jewish laws. We can never please God with our own efforts. The way to please God is to die with Christ and let the life of Christ reign in you.

Remember, God said He was well pleased with His Son. Are you in Christ? Then God is well pleased with you. Just let His life be expressed through you as He directs moment by moment.

Consider: If we could please God by trying, why did Jesus go to the cross? He died as a sacrifice for our sins, so that we might receive the Spirit. Let His life, in all its goodness and holiness, be expressed through you. Is He living through you?

**September 20 Morning**

Job 23:10-12 *10 But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold. 11 My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside. 12 I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread*.

Job’s friends continued to insist that he is being punished for his sin. They kept telling him that the wicked are always punished and the righteous are always blessed. Job told them that this was just not true. Many wicked live in prosperity and die in peace. Many righteous suffer without a cause that can be determined. He told them their counsel was just plain lies. We’d like to think that judgment for the wicked is always swift and observable, but God often reserves judgment for the Day of Judgment.

Job had a firm conviction that he had not intentionally committed anything for which the Lord would deal like this with him. He had retraced his actions, thought through his life, and not been able to find anything for which God would be disciplining him. How few of us can make the same statement! Of course he had sinned, but he had not intentionally rebelled against God’s will.

Instead of punishment, he now saw this as a refining process, just as gold is refined by fire. We will see this idea again throughout the Scriptures, but this is the first mention of it chronologically. What words is Job referring to when he speaks of ‘the words of God’s mouth’? He may have had an oral report of Adam to Abraham but as yet there were no written accounts that we know of, with the possible exception of the Book of Enoch. Did Job once hear the still small voice of God? He complained that no matter which direction he turned God was not to be found. Perhaps he had found God in the past in that voice within his heart, but now the heavens were silent. He treasured the words of God more than his daily food. That was what led to such a righteous life. There will be times in our lives when we are walking with God and yet we do not hear His voice. We must proceed by faith, knowing He is refining and teaching the children upon whom He has fixed His love.

Encouragement: You will come out as refined gold.

**September 20 Evening**

Galatians 3:26-29 *26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

What makes a person a child of God? Paul clearly says that it is through faith in Christ Jesus. Immersed (baptized) in Christ, we become clothed in Christ. When the world sees us, it should see Christ. This transformation does not come about by trying to be good. Certainly we need to cooperate with the Spirit, and that is sometimes a battle between our flesh and spirit. If we are in Christ, the spirit in us, where Christ is enthroned, should rule our flesh. When that is the case, the world sees Jesus in our words and actions.

Our gender, nationality, or status in life doesn’t matter. We express the life of Christ. That is the only way the early church was so successful at converting so many souls and standing against persecution. They were indwelt by Christ, and they were clothed in Christ. That is what made them one. That is what makes us one. The same nature, character and expression of that character show a unity. That is what makes the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit One.

Just as you look back to the work of Christ, the patriarchs looked forward to the work that God promised them. As Abraham placed his faith in God’s ability to provide a son, and the Son, God counted his faith as righteousness. God made specific promises about a descendant. You and I become recipients of the promises when we place our faith in Christ. Being in Christ makes you the seed of Abraham. It makes you an heir of the promise.

God didn’t have a plan that didn’t work and then have to improvise. He has known from the beginning exactly what He would do to bring mankind to Himself. Don’t neglect the Old Testament. In it we find shadows, pictures, and promises that reveal the nature of God and His plan for us.

Remember: As you get dressed each morning, clothe yourself with Christ.

**September 21 Morning**

Job 31:1, 9,11-12 *1 "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.*

*9 "If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door, …*

*11 For that would have been shameful, a sin to be judged. 12 It is a fire that burns to Destruction; it would have uprooted my harvest*.

In Job 31, Job began to list the areas in which he had been faithful. His friends seem to have thought there must have been some hidden sin somewhere. Job resisted declaring the specifics of his righteousness up to this point, but since they insisted, he began to list all the areas he had already gone over in his own heart.

The first one that was mentioned is lust. Job recognized the destructiveness of lust and made a covenant with his eyes not to look on a girl lustfully. He recognized it as a fire that burned to Destruction. He had probably witnessed that fire in the lives of young men in the city in which he lived. He learned from their sad stories.

In the world today, there are a million excuses to ignore this wise direction. Even though society considers it wrong to consider women as objects, it sets a double standard in flaunting women’s bodies in clothing design, in entertainment, and even in its contests for the best looking woman of an area. If man had difficulty in the days of Job, when women were covered with robes, what are they to do in this day and age? We can do the same as Job. Look at the eyes, the windows of the soul. Refuse to contemplate the person as anything other than an eternal soul that is loved of God. This is as good a plan today for men as it is for women. Don’t joke about a desire for the body of another. It is not a laughing matter. It is a fire that burns to Destruction. There are so few that set an example in this area today. It is considered prudish or religious.

Instruction: Set an example for your own sake. Don’t become another statistic of the fire that burns to Destruction. Make a covenant today with your eyes!

**September 21 Evening**

Galatians 5:13,16-17 *13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. 16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.*

Christ has set us free from the rules and regulations of the laws delivered to

Moses. Now we have a much more comprehensive guideline, the life of the Holy Spirit. Free from the many details of the law can be misconstrued to be indulgence in the sinful nature. It is just the opposite. It is submission to the Spirit of God. In submitting to the Spirit, we love one another with the love of Jesus. We are willing to lay down our lives for one another. Under the law I could go my own way in selfishness. Under the life of the Spirit I cannot pass my brother in need. Their need becomes mine. I weep with those that weep. I share what I have with those in need. My life becomes a life of service.

If your life flows from the Spirit of God who lives within you, you will not go about trying to gratify your sinful nature. That doesn’t mean you will never fail under temptation, it simply means that the driving force of your life has now changed. You once lived only to gratify self. Now you live for God’s pleasure, and in doing so love your neighbor as yourself.

The sinful nature and the Spirit have opposing desires. You can’t live for them both at the same time. It will put your soul into conflict. One or the other will win out. New creations in Christ do not desire to fulfill their sinful nature’s desires. When we fall into sin, realize it is not what our new nature wants. If the sinful nature’s desires are still what your heart truly wants, you have yet to surrender to the Spirit and become a new creation in Christ. Ask Him to take over the very desires of your heart. Claim the many promises given to those who call on Jesus. They promise a new heart to those who call on Him.

Consider: Is your freedom expressed in service?

**September 22 Morning**

Job 31:24-25, 28 *24 "If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, 'You are my security,' 25 if I have rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained,*

*28 then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high*.

Job continued his defense before his friends. He told how he always helped the needy and took good care of his workers. He said that he was consistent to do those things because he had a fear of God. He knew God required it of him, and that he would be judged if he did not. As we look at Job’s defense, few of us can say that our lives come anywhere close to Job’s. Yet, the real standard is not Job but Jesus Christ. Thank God for sending His Son to be the sacrifice for our sins.

In the passage today, Job says that he did not trust in his great wealth. Jesus told us it was very hard for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God. Job seems to have been one of the few who could be trusted with wealth but not rely on it for security. He recognized that provision came from God. Though he labored to earn income, he knew God is the Provider. How many of us can be just as secure when our bank accounts are bottoming out as when they are bulging? That can only come when we see God is our security regardless of how much we possess.

He did not even rejoice over his wealth. It is one thing to be thankful and another to find joy in something. Our joy should always be the presence of God in our lives. When wealth becomes our reason for rejoicing we are turning it into an idol that takes God’s place. Job said that both trusting in wealth for security and finding your joy in wealth were both sins to be judged. Both are unfaithfulness to God.

Dear reader, pause and consider if wealth has taken God’s place in your heart as the reason you rejoice. Let us guard our hearts so that we are not seduced by wealth to worship another god. In this passage, he groups this sin with worship of the sun and moon, other gods. If you have fallen in this area of making wealth a god, confess your sin, and put God back in His rightful place in your heart. See that He alone is your security and your greatest joy.

**September 22 Evening**

Galatians 5:22-24 *22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

In Paul’s letter to the Galatians, he was encouraging them to walk in the Spirit. Other teachers were trying to get them to follow formulas and rules. The problem with that is that you can keep good rules with an evil heart. Obedience to the Spirit causes us to confront the areas of our hearts that are not surrendered to His love.

Since obeying the Spirit is not something that can be put in a box and formulated, Paul had to define what it looked like in some way. Anyone can say they are led of the Spirit, when in fact, they are just doing what they desire. So, what does obedience to the Spirit look like? How can we tell that we are not deceiving ourselves?

First, Paul listed what the works of our old nature look like. Then he listed the product, fruit, of the Spirit. Notice that the word is singular. The work of the Spirit in us produces all the qualities mentioned together, not individually. If one is missing there is something of the flesh entering in. If I possess and express love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, I am walking in the Spirit. In the Spirit I would not be acting against God’s righteousness. Therefore I am doing what God requires. But, if one of those qualities is missing, it is a warning to me that the flesh is interfering with the Spirit’s reign in me.

Those who have given themselves to Jesus as a living sacrifice have identified with Jesus in His crucifixion. They have placed their sinful nature on the cross with Him. They consider that old nature judged and finished. It may struggle in death throws. I may revert, without thinking, to an old way of acting, but my heart has been changed. I don’t desire those things. The rearing of its ugly head just makes me aware of an area I then readily submit to my new Master, Christ.

Consider: Are you a new creation?

**September 23 Morning**

Job 40:6-8 *6 Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm: 7 "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. 8 "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?*

Once Job had finished justifying himself, his three friends said no more. A younger man then spoke up. He told Job the thing that he had done wrong was to justify himself rather than God. The young man, Elihu, insisted that God’s character was unquestionable.

Then God showed up. He had a few questions to ask Job. His questions served one purpose, to show that God is all-knowing and we are not. We can’t question what He allows because we have so few facts. He sees every aspect in the past, present, and future. How dare we question the character of the Almighty who moment by moment gives us life!

If there was a sin in Job’s response to his condition, it was to justify himself and thereby accuse God. In justifying himself, he was saying that God had made a mistake. True, his friends drove him to it, but he yielded to the temptation to make himself look good, and by contrast said that God was doing something wrong. *“Would you condemn me to justify yourself?”* God asked.

In times of difficulty, when we cannot understand the reason or purpose for the struggle in our lives, we can count on the integrity and justice of God. The one thing we dare not do is say God is unjust in His dealing with us. Would you discredit His justice? We must proceed in faith, knowing that our understanding is limited and His is infinite.

Remember: God can take it when we question Him. He understands our weakness. Just don’t push it too far, especially as a poor testimony before others. God may question you.

**September 23 Evening**

Galatians 6:8-10 *8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. 9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

The law of sowing and reaping is a concept that we should be aware of in everything we do. Paul often describes things as either black or white. In this passage, he tells us that when we sow, we sow either to please our sinful nature or to please the Spirit. It can be a litmus test for our decisions about our actions. Ask yourself, “By this action, which of the two am I aiming to please?” Then consider the consequences, or results, from the choice.

Sowing to please the sinful nature will reap destruction. Sin’s wages are death. Satan has come to kill, steal, and destroy. Every time you sow to the flesh you participate in his kingdom and will harvest his fruits. There may be pleasure for a short time, but the harvest is on its way. When it comes, we often complain to God asking, “How could You let this happen?” We reap the results of our actions. We want God to intervene and cause His laws of consequence to be overruled by grace, but He wants us to learn this law. It will help us to do what is right next time if we have to endure the consequences of our actions.

The other side of the coin is the reward of sowing to please the Spirit. There is a harvest of eternal life to be reaped. That does not just mean our salvation, but includes it. When you chose to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you were sowing to the Spirit. When you choose to help a person in need, especially a fellow believer, you are sowing to the Spirit. When you do good at the leading of the Spirit, you are sowing to the Spirit and laying up an eternal reward. We reap some of the blessings of sowing goodness in this life, but most of our treasures are secure in heaven. To which are you sowing to please by your choices today?

Consider: This law of sowing and reaping is true in every decision we make.

**September 24 Morning**

Job 42:5-6 *5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. 6 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."*

Job had been questioning God, but now it is God’s turn to question Job. The substance of God’s questions ask Job that if he lives in a world full of things beyond his understanding, why should he be able to figure out what God is presently doing in his life? Such a wonderful Creator should be trusted by His creation to do what is in their best interest.

Job entered into a new relationship with God. Up until that time he had heard of God through others lives and stories. Now he saw God with his own eyes. He has the same reaction that everyone does. He saw the holiness of God and by contrast, his wretched condition. But didn’t God say Job was righteous? No, God said there was no one on earth like him (1:8). Compared to other men he is blameless and upright. Compared to God he is a sin sick man with a sin-infested nature. Job learned genuine humility from this encounter. The manifest presence of God blows away any deceptions of our own goodness. We need God’s manifest presence in the church today to see our real condition.

God restored everything that Job had lost, and then doubled it. There is one notable exception. He had as many children as he originally had. Why is that? Why weren’t they doubled? Besides being hard on his wife, they really were doubled. He never lost the first set of children. They merely moved to heaven before Job did. He now has 20 children, even though ten are in heaven. Things are not always as they appear. The book of Job is an exhortation to trust God no matter what you are going through.

Consider: You may never know the reasons for certain trials and struggles, but you can be sure your Creator’s character is impeccable. God will see you through, if you will continue to trust in Him.

**September 24 Evening**

Galatians 6:14-15 *14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.*

The letter to the church of Galatia was meant to help them see that obeying the laws of Moses could never help their relationship with God. The men who were insisting that obedience was necessary were missing the main point. Jesus paid it all! They wanted to convert these non-Jewish Christians to Judaism. Then they could boast about them conforming to their customs and laws.

Paul was teaching them that the only thing worth boasting about was the one thing that made them right with God. That is the cross of Calvary. The cross is what makes us dead to the world, not laws. The laws could never change the heart of man that desires sin. The law just made you guilty. It looked forward to the final solution, the cross. The autopilot of the heart keeps guiding us into sin unless it is changed. The law couldn’t change it. The cross does.

It doesn’t matter to God whether you have performed Jewish rituals that are symbolic of spiritual things or if you haven’t. What matters is if your heart has been changed. Is your autopilot now set upon the Spirit? If it is still set on the sinful nature, all the good laws in the world won’t do anything about it.

Perhaps you have been trying to keep a list of good things that Christians should do, but you still constantly yield to sin. Those good things are wonderful, but they can’t change your heart any more than laws can. To be a new creation in Christ you must first crucify the old one. You must take it to the cross in repentance and crucify it with Jesus. The sins of the world were placed on Him. Have you put your sinful nature there to be dealt with by the justice of God? If you have, you should be as Paul was, crucified to the world. Your autopilot is then set on pleasing the heart of God by cooperating with the Spirit that lives within you.

Consider: Where does your autopilot keep pulling you?

**September 25 Morning**

Psalms 1:1-3 *1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers*.

The book of Psalms is a collection of songs of praise. Originally, they came in five different books. Many of them were penned by David. In them, we find expressed the heart cry of man in nearly every situation. No matter what you are going through you can find a psalm that relates to your situation. I turn to them when I am discouraged, for they often begin with complaint and end in praise.

The first psalm warns us not to keep company with evil people. We are told not to listen to their counsel, stand in their way or sit in their seats. The word ‘blessed’ is translated ‘happy’ in some newer renderings. Blessing implies the goodness of God will be with such a person. Look for these beatitudes throughout Scripture. If the Word gives us instruction as to what to do to find God pouring out His goodness on us, we should give careful attention to that instruction. You will be blessed if you avoid bad company. Man has a natural tendency to gravitate toward mocking and complaint. Don’t!

Instead, delight in God’s Word. Think on it day and night. If you will take some time each day to be in the company of the Word, and let Him speak to you, you will have a thought to dwell on that will build you up instead of tearing you down. Avoiding the mocking sinner and filling your mind with God’s instruction will cause you to be blessed.

In typical Hebrew style, the psalmist expands on what it means to be blessed in a simile. You will be like a tree that bears fruit planted by a stream. You won’t dry out. You will prosper in everything you do. What a picture! What a promise! If you believe it, then you should act on it. Take time each day to delight in the Word of God. Take a thought with you through the day.

Consider: “If I meditate on God’s Word and don’t walk in the counsel of the wicked, whatever I do will prosper.”

**September 25 Evening**

Ephesians 1:13-14 *13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.*

Every spiritual blessing is ours in Christ Jesus! (Ephesians 1:3) Being in Christ, having hidden our life in His, and being clothed with Him, means that God sees Jesus when He looks at us. We get included in on all the good things that Christ deserves. Salvation is being included in Christ, being a part of His body. That affects us in so many ways. When we accepted the word of truth, we became included in Him. Are you continuing to remain in Him? (John 15:4-6)

When you believed and were included in Christ, you were marked with a seal. Just like a wax seal stamped with a signet shows that what is inside is from the bearer of the signet, so the outer you should reflect Christ to the extent that others know that what is on the inside is from the Lord. Only the Holy Spirit can produce those fruits in us. When you sense those fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, and self-control, you can know that you belong to Jesus. You are assured that you are truly saved. Perhaps someone is yelling at you, and you are able to stay in control and even find compassion for him or her. Or maybe circumstances all seem to be against you and yet you are experiencing peace and joy. That is experiencing the deposit.

The word “deposit” is very similar to how we would use the term “down payment.” It means we have a portion of what we will one day receive. Every believer has a deposit. It is our guarantee. It tells us one day our bodies will be redeemed, changed, transformed, and we will be able to receive the full amount. As much as you have experienced the Spirit of God, you haven’t tasted but a small portion. We are God’s possession. His plan is that we be to the praise of His glory.

Consider: He takes the lowliest thing and transforms it into a thing that displays the wonder of His ability. Is your life given to God for His work?

**September 26 Morning**

Psalms 2:6-8 *6 "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." 7 I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession*.

Many of the psalms look forward in time to the first and second coming of Jesus. Because Jesus is referred to as ‘the son of David’, there are things written about Solomon that are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.

In the second psalm, God is speaking to the nations of the world that refuse God’s instruction. They rebel against His loving decrees. But God is not threatened at all. In fact, He laughs. If all the nations of the earth were to join together to fight against Him, it would not disturb His peace one bit. Then God declares where His sovereign will has placed all authority to rule, in His Son.

The Son was with God from the beginning, but there is a point in human history when he is born of a woman. The birth in Bethlehem was one of the most amazing and supernatural events to ever take place. God stepped into a human body. The Son was willing to set an example for man and redeem man through His own obedient death on the cross, so God has given Him the right to rule the kingdoms of the earth. One day He will no longer allow man to rebel. The freedom to mock God and His laws and cause the people to suffer will no longer be allowed. Those rulers who would rebel will face the rod of iron. Man keeps trying to make the perfect government. The perfect government is coming.

Meditation: The King of kings will be installed on Zion, God’s holy hill, and will reign in righteousness. Are you letting Him rule in your heart today?

**September 26 Evening**

Ephesians 1:17-19 *17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength,*

Paul gave us an example in praying for fellow believers. Some believers make it a practice to pray the very words that the Spirit gave Paul to pray for people on their heart. You might try it.

He told the Ephesians that he kept on asking. He didn’t just pray it once, but continued to plead with God for these things. His first request was that they be given the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. This isn’t just general wisdom, or revelation of things to come, but wisdom and revelation to know Jesus better. That is the real need of every believer. Knowing Jesus better means maturity. As we see Him more clearly, we are changed to be more like Him. That does not come simply from study. It comes from the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. You can read the same passage a thousand times, but until you listen to the Spirit speaking through it, you will not see anything new of Jesus. The Spirit always points to Jesus and reveals Him in a greater way to us. Are you learning more about Jesus? This was Paul’s first request and chief concern.

Then he prayed that the eyes of their hearts would be enlightened to know the hope to which He had called them, the glorious inheritance in the saints. The hope, the glorious inheritance in us, is our transformation into the likeness of Christ. Why would God call us His inheritance? In another passage Paul wrote, “Christ in you, the hope of glory,” and “I labor in travail until Christ is formed in you.” God looks forward to the final product. Will you see that today in your brothers and sisters, and especially in those who irritate you?

Last, he prayed that we would see the incomparably great power that is for us, changing us into His image. It is resurrection power!

Consider: Resurrection power is at work in you!

**September 27 Morning**

Psalms 8:3-5 *3 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? 5 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor*.

The clear night sky is awe-inspiring. One of my favorite places is a canyon lake far from big cities. The night sky appears to be entirely filled with stars. The band of the Milky Way glows with the light of a million stars. We count the shooting stars until we fall asleep. Now we know so much more about the enormity and complexity of that night sky than David did. It should awe us even more when we consider that our God set all that in place. He decreed the laws by which it all functions. Man is increasingly wondering at the mysteries and beauty we see there.

Considering that seemingly infinite space and vast number of worlds, what is man that God is mindful of us? He thinks of each of us continually. Why? What a great priority He has placed upon us as small as we are. He made us a little lower than *elohim.* The Hebrew word is used for God or angelic beings, and that is why you find some variations in the translation. I prefer *“a little lower than God,”* since we will judge angels and they are sent to minister to us. It seems that David is in awe of the position God has given man in the order of creation. As small and insignificant as we seem, He has put great priority on us, crowning us with glory and honor.

In light of such honor, our sin all the more abhorrent. To think that we would rebel against the Almighty, our Maker, who gave us such a lofty position, shows the depravity of our ingratitude. What is man? We are so honored and offered such glory that our minds can scarce conceive it. Look up into the night sky.

Consider: How should I respond to such a gracious and loving God?

**September 27 Evening**

Ephesians 2:6-7,10 *6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*

*10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Those who place their faith in Christ Jesus identify themselves with Him in His death, burial, resurrection and ascension. We are in Him, so when He suffered on the cross, our sinful nature was there dying His death. When we were baptized, we related His burial to the burial of our old nature. When we came up from the water, we related His resurrection to our new life in Him. He ascended victorious to sit at the right hand of God, and yet He is with us always. We are seated with Him, in Him, with all the rights and privileges His victorious life merited, yet we are here working out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Why would God choose to take such fallen, wicked creatures and redeem and transform them, giving them such privilege and honor? In the ages to come, He will show the incomparable riches of His grace that expressed itself in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. In that day, we will look at where we came from, and see our former depravity clearly, and at the same time, see the finished work of Christ in us. We will be overwhelmed with a sense of the incomparable riches of His grace. We understand just a fraction of it now. Then it will cause us to fall on our knees in worship and praise.

It is all by grace. It has nothing to do with what we have done. There will be no boasting of any works when we are in heaven. We will be in awe of the poem He created with our rebellious lives. Every poem will be unique, and yet every one will cry, *“Incomparable riches of His grace”.* Every good work He orchestrated, every good deed performed, will then be recognized as coordinated and empowered by God. Then we will finally realize the depth of Jesus saying, *“Without Me, you can do nothing.*”

Consider: Are you relying on His power today?

**September 28 Morning**

Psalms 19:1-3 *1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. 3 There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard*.

David looked up at the night sky and saw a declaration of the glory of God. With the Hubble we can see even more wondrous and amazing sights far beyond the range of David’s eyes. But we have a different response. We have the audacity to think we have figured God out. Even macro-physicists have to include God in their equations. The more we discover the less we realize we know. Today you will find a majority of astronomers believing there must be a God. One astronomer wrote that to find an argument against the existence of God, he had to go to another department. Yet the average person on the street has the impression that astronomers have it all figured out as a natural process. Let’s hope that more astronomers will speak up about their lack of understanding of all that they see so that our perceptions will be corrected.

One of the sad byproducts of city life is that the stars can barely be seen. Our skies are so polluted that we have hidden the declaration. To replace that effect, we have the pictures from the Hubble continuing to come in as it shoots picture after picture of wonders full of color, design, and phenomena that causes us to marvel. It doesn’t need to be translated into French or Russian. It speaks in every language. It displays the knowledge of an infinite Creator who makes laws, order, and design. When you see those pictures, listen to God.

Consider: The heavens are still declaring the glory of God. Are you listening?

**September 28 Evening**

Ephesians 2:19-21 *19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord*.

Paul explains that Christ makes Jew and non-Jew one *“by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.”* Ephesians 2:15a Jesus fulfilled the Law, became our sacrificial lamb, and made us right with God through His sacrifice. The law was the thing that separated the Jew and non-Jew, but now they are both recipients of the same promises and blessings through accepting Jesus keeping the law for them. Now there is no difference between believing Jew and another people group that believes.

The Jews had the promises and words of God. They were God’s special people, the family of God. Now, all who believe in Christ have become citizens of heaven, the favored ones, and part of God’s family. We stand together on the foundation of the teaching of the apostles and prophets, all of which is squared with the main cornerstone, Jesus Christ. It is in Him that the building takes shape, with you as a part of it, rising to become a holy temple in the Lord.

Are you on that foundation? Do the words of the prophets and apostles form the basis on which you stand? Is Jesus your point of alignment in all you do today? Then you are a part of His family. You are a part of His temple. You are a habitation of God through the Spirit. The promises of God’s word are yours. Though you will face trials that are painful and tough, your destiny is certain. Every test will shape you to fit into your place in this holy Temple.

Remember: Yours is a high and holy calling. Don’t be moved. Stand firm as the Master Craftsman shapes you to be a perfect fit in Him.

**September 29 Morning**

Psalms 19:7-9 *7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous*.

You are reading this devotion today because you believe God’s Word is a need in your life. This passage in Psalm 19 gives a picture of what a great need it is. In all this world, there is one perfect thing, the Word of God. It revives our soul. When you are downcast and need to find hope, the Word of God is the source of hope. It will revive your soul. If you are a simple trusting soul, where should you turn? The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy. Man will always disappoint. Not one man, other than Jesus, has completely trustworthy counsel.

Where can you go for true joy? Happiness will come and go, but the truth of God’s promises to you will give you an inner joy that will endure all circumstances of life. If you need clarity to see the way things really are, you need the radiant light of the Word. It illuminates the motivations of men. It illuminates the motivations of our own hearts. Without the Word of God our hearts would easily deceive us. The Word shines the light of truth on our thoughts and reveals whether they are from our flesh or the Spirit.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. In the Word we see the just judgment on those who turn from God and rebel against Him. We see the treachery and cunning of man’s own heart. The fear of our just God keeps us from playing around with the idea of compromising with sin. Every word of God is pure. You can trust every verse to be completely righteous. Sometimes our carnal mind gets confused by expressions in the Word. We struggle to accept what is written. But if we dig deeper, we will find every word to be altogether righteous. Where else could you go to find all these wonderful things? The man or woman who does the same for you, is a man or woman full of the Word of God. They have had their mind renewed by the Word of God.

Encouragement: You are on the right track by taking time today to meditate on the Word.

**September 29 Evening**

Ephesians 3:16-18 *16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,*

Here is the beginning of another prayer from the lips of the Apostle Paul for the churches in Asia Minor. It is a prayer we might pray for our fellow believers. The second half of the prayer will be in tomorrow’s devotion. Let’s look closely and see what was on his heart to pray for those churches.

First, he prayed that their inner being might be strengthened through God’s Spirit; in other words, that their spirit may be growing and strong, victorious in that constant battle with the flesh. He prayed this so that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith. These folks have already received Christ. It is another thing for Christ to be at home in their hearts because of their faith in Him for the daily battles of life. Is Christ at home in your heart? Is the Spirit in your spirit victorious over the battles with your old nature? Is Christ reigning in or enduring the condition of your heart? And what of your brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you praying for them to be strengthened out of His glorious riches so that Christ will be at home in them?

He went on to pray that they would be rooted and established in love. This is the great commandment, to love God with our all. Paul is praying that they would be deeply and solidly anchored in love of and for God. How does that come about? By receiving power to grasp the extent of Christ’s love for us, to see the dimensions of that love, we find a love for Him birthed within us. Love begets love. When we are loved, we find we love in response. If you want to love Christ in a fuller way, see the dimensions of His love for you personally. All the saints are to receive this power together, to grasp the dimensions of His love together. The more we love Him, the more we encourage our brothers and sisters to love Him wholeheartedly. The prayer continues in tomorrow’s devotion.

Prayer: Lord, please give me the grace to receive the power to grasp the magnitude of Your love for me.

**September 30 Morning**

Psalms 22:1, 16, 18 *1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?*

*16 Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.*

*18 They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.*

One thousand years before Jesus was born, the shepherd king, David, wrote this prophetic song. We don’t know the details surrounding it. Was he going through some similar circumstance, such as the attempt to murder him by King Saul? Or was he lying on the grass while watching his sheep when the Spirit of God came upon him and he began to sing this song? We can only guess.

What we do know is that a millennium in the future, Jesus would be nailed to a Roman cross and begin to quote this psalm so full of the details of that moment. If God could inspire a shepherd to pen the details of that horrible moment, then surely God is sovereign over it. Though Jesus did not sense God’s presence, He did have His Word in His heart that assured Him that the Father knew exactly what was happening and what would happen.

God had forsaken Jesus because the sin of the world was placed upon Him. The Father is of purer eyes than to behold evil (Habakkuk 1:13). Jesus knew the answer, but the psalm was voiced for us. Dogs were the term that the Jews used for Gentiles. In typical Hebrew style David repeated the expression in different terms, “a band of evil men.” The Roman Gentile soldiers surrounded the scene. Crucifixion, in which the hands and feet were pierced, was invented shortly before Jesus was born. This prophetic word was truly a glimpse into the future.

An article of clothing was much more valuable to people of the first century because of the time and effort to produce it. Many only had one main robe and a cloak for colder weather. Jesus robe was made of one solid weaving and therefore even more valuable. The soldiers divided up the smaller articles of clothing, but to keep the value intact, they decided not to divide the robe. Instead they put each of their names on a stone, put the stones in a jar, and shook the jar until one stone fell out. The person whose name was on that stone won the robe, not knowing that they had just fulfilled the words of an ancient prophecy.

Consider: If God knows the details of every trial His children endure, we can trust Him to see us through trials and into a greater victory than we can imagine, just as He did with His only begotten Son. Trust Him! He knows your future.

**September 30 Evening**

Ephesians 3:19-21 *19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

This prayer is continued from the previous day’s devotion. Paul was impressed by the Holy Spirit to pray that the believers get a grasp on the dimensions of the love of Christ. Because love begets love, our perception of God’s love for us will create in us a love for Him. But Paul says this love surpasses knowledge. It is not just something we intellectually attain. Just because you have a PhD in religious studies does not mean that you grasp the love of Christ. It must come from a relationship of time together and revelation. It is the one thing that will cause us to continue strong to the end. Only love will capture our hearts so that we, in turn, put Him above all else. Paul was making the point that the law could not do that for us.

The only way to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God was through a revelation of Christ’s love. No formula or rules could produce that change in our lives. Filled to the measure of the fullness of God must come from an intimate relationship with God Himself. Christ in us, communing with us, working through us, is the only way to have that fullness.

Does that sound impossible? Paul says that it is possible through His power at work in us, because God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. Is it hard for you to imagine your life bringing glory to God every day? He can do it! Is hard to imagine loving Him above all other things in life? A revelation of His love can do it.

Consider: Why not take a moment, open your Bible to this passage, and pray verse 16-21 for the people you know that are struggling. Pray it for you and your family. Pray it for your Pastor and elders. The answer to our spiritual struggles is a grasp of the dimensions of the love of Christ for us.

**October 1 Morning**

Psalms 23:1-3 *1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake*.

This is undoubtedly the most famous psalm. The analogy of the LORD being our shepherd was taken up by Jesus in John chapter 10. When He said, *“I am the shepherd of the sheep,”* He was declaring Himself to be the LORD God. It is an analogy upon which many a book has been written. In this short devotional we can only touch upon a few of the points.

Sheep are dumb, stinky creatures. I hope you don’t feel offended, but I can say that because I am one. Without a shepherd to watch over and guide them, they would be easy prey for predators. They can’t seem to find pasture for themselves, and when they try to, they often end up in precarious situations from which they need to be rescued.

The Eternal God is our shepherd. Could there be any better? When you realize just how needy we are as sheep, it is a very comforting thought to know the Almighty God is our shepherd. We will never have a need He will not meet. He will guide us to places rich in pasture so that we will have plenty to nourish our souls. He will guide us to places of rest with plenty to eat and drink. And when we are discouraged and feel as if everything is against us, He restores our very souls. He lifts us out of the pit of despair and encourages us with the loving smile from His face.

And why does He do all this for these stinky, dumb sheep? It is all for His name’s sake. His name is the sum of His marvelous attributes. Would He be good, merciful, gracious, just, loving, holy, and righteous if He just let such dumb creatures as us wander to our doom? To show the excellence of His character, the greatness of His heart, He chose to be our shepherd. You could not find another that comes close in comparison. When you realize your condition and the LORD’S wonderful offer to be our shepherd, why would you try to wander off or go your own way?

Consider: Follow the shepherd closely and the promises in this psalm will be yours.

**October 1 Evening**

Ephesians 4:1-3 *1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*.

Paul was imprisoned for preaching, “Jesus is Lord.” Of his own volition, he was also a prisoner to the will of God. He found that being a prisoner of God’s will was a far greater freedom than any “freedom” he could find in the world. He was freed from the subtle control of evil. Since his life exemplified surrender to God, he could ask his converts to do the same. It is a matter of living a life worthy of the great calling we have received.

As Christians, you have a calling that is greater than any secular calling. You are to represent the nature of God to the world you come in contact with. You are called to be a priest to the world that does not know or understand what God is like. Every word you speak and every action you make as a Christian is interpreted by unbelievers as a representation of what a child of God looks like. That is why Paul urges us to live a life that measures up to the calling.

That life should look like Jesus, completely humble and gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love. When unbelievers see Christians act like the world, they conclude that their message is not authentic. When they see us fight amongst ourselves, split up our fellowship, refuse to humble ourselves and take the lowest place, they certainly do not see something representative of our Savior. We keep telling them that He will make a difference in their lives, but they won’t believe it until they see it in us.

Paul emphasized this expression of Christ’s likeness in our relationship with other believers. We have the same Lord, the same faith, the same baptism, so why are we arguing over the trivial issues? It’s pride! We insist on being the one who is right. The humility and gentleness of Christ is the last thing we are willing to exhibit. Consider how many things around Jesus He refused to address because they were not essential.

Remember: Bear with one another in love.

**October 2 Morning**

Psalms 24:1 *1 The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;*

We sometimes think of possessions as being ours. We are stewards over things but for a short time. Everything is from God and will return to God. I am speaking not just of physical things but also power and authority. 1 Chronicles 29:11-12 *11 Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. 12 Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all*.

Whatever you have, whatever authority or influence you attain to, it is all from God, and it will all return to God. He is all-powerful and so all power is from Him and returns to Him. We need to get a grip on this reality so that we don’t get wrapped up in the idea of possessing things. Your house is not yours. Your clothes are not yours. Your children are not yours. It all belongs to God. How should that affect our attitude when we must part with any of these? If we think we own it, we will cling desperately to it and be grieved when it is taken. If we realize it is all God’s and returns to God, we can let go, graciously thanking Him for the short time we were blessed to be the stewards of God’s things.

This acknowledgement of reality will also keep us from the selfish attitude that God owes us something. Romans 11:35 *35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?* We have never given to God anything that was not already His. Now do you still feel as generous about that last big offering you gave? It was already God’s. The act of giving at the leading of the Holy Spirit is just a reminder that we are only stewards who should act according to God’s direction when He tells us to do something with what is already His.

Suggestion: Look around you. Imagine a name label on everything you see, “On loan from Almighty God.” See how that changes your attitude toward all things.

**October 2 Evening**

Ephesians 4:11-13 *11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

This passage is known as the five (or four) fold ministry. God designed the church with servants as leaders. These servants have specific gifts. The church widely differs on whether there are apostles today. Apostle means an official representative. Peter described the roll of the Apostle as one who could testify as an eyewitness of the resurrection. In that sense of the word the role of apostle is no more. Some compare the apostle to church planters today.

The role of prophet is also interpreted very differently in the church. Some see it as a similar role to the Old Testament prophet. Others point out Jesus’ declaration that John was the last prophet (Luke 16:16). They see prophecy today as the timely Spirit directed presentation of the Word. Still others believe this role ceased after the apostolic age.

Most agree on the role of an evangelist. They are those who are gifted to declare the Gospel in the power of the Spirit, winning many to Christ. The last two, pastor and teacher, are seen as one calling by most Greek scholars. This role is also widely accepted as those who teach and preach the Word, while caring for the flock of God.

No matter what your interpretation of the ministries are, we can all see that their role is to prepare God’s people for works of service. They are to build up the body so that it is unified, mature, and Christ like. These ministries are to assist the church in coming together in the knowledge of the Son of God. The more we focus on who Jesus is, the more unified we become. Though we may differ on the details, the main thing is knowing Christ.

Remember: A healthy church is one in which the leadership constantly helps you grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

**October 3 Morning**

Psalms 27:1, 4 *1 The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear?*

*The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid?*

*4 One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple*.

David declared the LORD to be his light and his salvation. It was the presence of the LORD in his life that enabled him to see things as they really were, that kept him from stumbling in the darkness. It was the presence of the LORD in his life that saved him out of all his difficulties. The LORD was his salvation. He didn’t lean on self to understand or to get him out of danger. He recognized that his help came from the LORD.

He goes on to say that men cannot make him afraid. If God is sovereign, and He has become my light and my salvation, what can man do to me? With the LORD as his stronghold, he always knew where to run for safety. Do you turn to God first in all your fears and concerns? Is He your light and salvation, the stronghold of your life? Without that, men will cause you to fear. Situations will overwhelm you. With that assurance, you will always know that the will of the God who loves you will be done. He will see you through anything men or demons can dish out.

And if you are called home, you will be in His presence forever. What is the worst man can do -kill me? Then I will end up where I long to be, gazing upon the beauty of the LORD and seeking Him in His heavenly dwelling place. David may have been referring to the tabernacle, but I think his mind moved from the earthly to the reality in heaven. His great desire was to spend eternity gazing upon God. Somewhere in those years of shepherding or training under Saul, he must have had a vision of the beauty of God. That became the one thing his soul sought after. We need a vision like that so that He becomes our one thing. Then, if illness strikes, or men threaten, like the Apostle Paul, we can say, “To die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

Consider: Make the LORD your one thing.

**October 3 Evening**

Ephesians 4:26-27, 31 *26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice*.

Anger can be a warning to us that something is wrong in our heart. Like a warning light on the dashboard of our car, it means to stop and check inside to see what is going on. Often times our pride has been wounded. Good! Exalting self above others needs to be more than wounded; it needs to die on the cross.

It may take some time to get down to the real problem. It may be deep-seated issues of receiving the anger of others, a sense of unfairness, or any number of other issues. Once we find the cause, we must deal with it in accordance with the new nature in us. Our renewed way of thinking must examine that issue in the light of truth. This does not mean it will immediately go away, but that we learn how to look at the issue in a new light.

It is important to not let anger go unchecked. That gives the devil a foothold. It can turn into bitterness, rage, brawling, slander and every form of malice. If any of these would characterize how you feel or behave toward another, the devil has a foothold in your life. That grieves the Holy Spirit. He is not comfortable dwelling in you when you allow this behavior to remain. You are not exemplifying the life of Christ, but that of the world.

God’s solution is to get rid of it. It is the simple and obvious answer, but you can only carry that out by surrendering to the love of Christ. Remember how He forgave you for worse offenses than the party that has made you angry. Look deeply into His love and grace and know that He wants to express that same grace through you. That does not mean that you have to trust or enable that person to harm you or others again, but it does mean your attitude of bitterness must go. This change is nothing short of a miracle. God will do it in you if you are willing. The Greek verb tense implies this is done at a point in time and remains done. Get rid of it! Don’t go on grieving the Spirit. He will help you.

Remember: If your warning light is on, deal with the problem.

**October 4 Morning**

Psalms 28:7-9 *7 The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song. 8 The LORD is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation for his anointed one. 9 Save your people and bless your inheritance; be their shepherd and carry them forever*.

Most of us would not consider shepherding a training ground for a national leader. That was God’s choice to train David. When the bear and lion came to tear the flock, David knew his strength was not sufficient. He learned to rely on the strength of the Lord. When his heart trusted in the LORD he found help and ended up writing a song of victory to the LORD.

He goes on to say the LORD is your strength, too. He knew it was true for everyone, for he was just a commoner when he began to find the strength that comes from God. His shepherd heart asked God to save the people and bless them. He knew he could do his best, but only God can save and bless. Then he asked for a very deeply symbolical request. *“Be their shepherd and carry them forever.”*

When a particular sheep would always wonder from the flock and get separated, it was in danger of being lost to predators. The shepherd had to exercise severe discipline to save the sheep’s life. He would break the leg of the sheep and then reset it and carry that sheep until the leg healed. That sheep would grow so attached to the shepherd that it would never again stray. Sometimes the only way to save us is to take us through a difficulty that drives us to the LORD. As we cling to Him and He to us, we learn that is a wonderful place to be. When the difficulty passes, we find ourselves remaining there. Look at your painful experiences in the light of this picture and you will have a different perspective on it. Remember, the shepherd took on a burden for a period of time because he cared for the sheep.

Remember the expression, “This is going to hurt me a lot more than it does you?” It did. It does. Let that touch your heart today.

**October 4 Evening**

Ephesians 5:15-18 *15 Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.*

We are supposed to have a new life in Christ, a new nature and heart. That does not mean that we are not susceptible to slipping back into the old nature or justifying compromise. Paul outlined, in this chapter, what the works of the flesh look like and warned the Ephesians that living like that excluded them from any inheritance in the kingdom of God (vs 5). It guarantees wrath (vs 6).

Then he reminded them to live in the light, expressing the attributes of God. If we love darkness, we need to examine whether or not we have truly repented and been born again. We are to find out what pleases the Lord and live in those ways. It may be something different for each of us, but whatever it is, it will be in the light. That is wise living. It is living with our focus on eternity. Investing in the temporal is unwise living.

We have a limited time and number of opportunities to serve our Maker. We should make as much of them as we can by the grace of God. The battle for souls is raging, and time is running out. Use the opportunities God gives you without fearing man. That is to understand what God’s will is. The foolish miss the opportunities God gives them. The wise step into each one. They know that pleasing the Lord is eternally rewarding.

Drunkenness only dulls you to opportunities. Dulling the senses and weakening your inhibitions It pulls you away from your potential and purpose. It is a substitute for the Spirit, a counterfeit. It allows the flesh to have an upper hand. Eventually, it will destroy you. Being filled with the Spirit is the opposite of drunkenness. It sharpens you to opportunities. It strengthens your boundaries. It helps you step into your potential and purpose. When the inevitable trials come, being filled with the Spirit will help you walk through them in victory.

Remember: This is an imperative command of Scripture: Be filled with the Spirit!

**October 5 Morning**

Psalms 30:5, 11-12 *5 For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. 11 You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, 12 that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever.*

It is interesting to note that David wrote this psalm for the dedication of the temple, which he knew would happen after his death. He so longed for the completion of a house for God and a permanent place for people to worship Him, that he made every preparation he could before he died, even the songs to be sung. Do we have such a desire for the spiritual house of God?

In this song David reminds us that our God given afflictions are very brief, but God’s favor lasts all our life. We may cry through the night, but God brings us joy the next morning. Whatever trial we are facing, it helps to remember this truth. Some trials seem long, but in the light of eternity and the favor of God upon our lives, they are fleeting. The Apostle Paul had a thorn in his side for years. It caused him to depend upon the grace and strength of God. This is quite different from dealing with the consequences of our sin. It is the condition of living in a fallen world.

God turns our wailing into an exuberant dance of joy. He takes the sackcloth of mourning from us and gives us a robe of joy. Know that on the other side of every trial there will be times of joy again, not just happiness, but heart filled joy. Why does He do this for us? It is so that we may sing to Him for His goodness to us, and thank Him for the lessons learned. We thank Him for walking through that Valley of the Shadow of Death with us.

Consider: We will give thanks to God forever for His favor upon us, for sharing His victory with us, and for filling us with His enduring joy.

**October 5 Evening**

Ephesians 5:21-22, 25 *21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.*

*2[[3]](#footnote-3) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her…*

The wisdom of how to get along with one another is found in Paul’s advice in this letter. He first tells us all we should have an attitude of submission to one another. In the military usage of this word, it meant to operate in the position you were placed under your commander. In the common usage it meant to give in to another’s demands. How many arguments have broken out and turned into horrible divisions because we are too proud to submit? Ask yourself if the issue at hand is worth what may result from refusal to submit. If not, just humbly submit in love and respect. It takes a strong spiritual person to do this.

Then Paul applies it to the woman’s role in the home. Men have a need to be respected and honored. This submission in the home meets one of the man’s basic needs. Where a wife is always putting down her husband or ignoring his requests, you will find a home in painful turmoil.

The man’s role is to love his wife *“just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her.”* That is the more demanding role. If he does that, the woman will not have a problem submitting any more than we should gladly submit to Christ because of His love for us. The husband will be meeting her most basic need, to be cherished and cared for out of love. That love is expressed in the husband giving up himself for his wife. Where the husband does not express love toward his wife, you will find a home in painful turmoil.

When you put these two ingredients together, love and submission, you will find a household that is at peace and full of joy. This is the basis for most marital counseling.

Consider: What can you do to fit into your God ordained role? The only way to help your spouse fit in their role is by living out your role more perfectly.

**October 6 Morning**

Psalms 32:1-2, 5 *1 Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 2 Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.*

5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah

In the Old Testament, there were laws that governed the rituals of dealing with sin. The sacrifices and offerings that were prescribed were a picture of Christ who would become the sacrifice in our place. Though the people of Israel followed the instructions given, some of them knew that it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to wash away sin. They knew the sacrifice was important, but they also knew it was not changing them.

In the psalm today, David tells of the blessing on the man whose sin is covered. Guilt is a heavy load. As he kept silent, trying to hide his sin, he said he felt the heavy hand of God upon him, causing his bones to feel old. Quite a description of guilt! How did David find relief? He ended his silence.

In the New Testament, we find that we are to confess our faults one to another so that we can pray for each other (James 5:16). Our old nature tells us to keep silent, but that just makes it worse. Once it is out in the light, we can deal with it and truly forsake it. As long as we hide it, we entertain thoughts of continuing in that evil pattern. But when we decide it is destroying us and needs to be forsaken, we bring it out by confession. Then we can ask for forgiveness and find that wonderful blessing David was speaking of. Is there a secret sin you are hiding in the darkness? Hold it up and examine it in the light of the cross where God’s love is displayed for you. Ask yourself if that sin compares in value to His love. Bring it into the light, confess it to God, and if necessary, if it still haunts you, confess it to a mature saint you can confide in.

Remember: Sin loses power when it is brought into the light.

**October 6 Evening**

Ephesians 6:10-12 (NIV) *10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

Paul’s final suggestion to the churches of Asia Minor was to be completely prepared for spiritual battle. Roman soldiers had a set of tools and clothing that helped them to be fully prepared. Paul related each article to something we need spiritually to be prepared for the spiritual battles we face.

Our passage today is not about the armor, but about our attitude and understanding, so that we can use the armor properly. First, it must be the Lord’s strength that we rely on and not our own. If you are thinking that you can’t make it through the battle, you are right. Only the Lord’s strength can see you through. Do not rely on your ability but on His.

Put on the full armor. I encourage you to read about each piece. Don’t get cocky and think you don’t need part of it. Our adversary is cunning and looks for weak spots. Don’t present any to him.

Realize that it is not a flesh and blood battle. That seems obvious, but part of the enemy’s tactic is to get you to think it is personally between you and an individual or group. Then you become bitter, and the enemy has the upper hand. Always look past the individuals to the spiritual realm where the battle is really raging. There are spiritual forces manipulating weak individuals to get at you. They work through lust, jealousy, greed and every fleshly desire to cause people to try to get you off track and out of the Spirit.

Take your stand against Satan’s schemes. Realize where the battle is really coming from. Fight with the Word of God and prayer. Keep your shield of faith up, trusting in the Lord to bring about good, because you are His.

Prayer: Lord, help me see where the battle is coming from and not to fight it on my own.

**October 7 Morning**

Psalms 37:4-5, 7 *4 Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:… 7 Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes*.

In this psalm, David is reflecting on the fact that the evil ones who threatened his life and plotted against him were ultimately unsuccessful. He is telling us the secret of his success and usefulness to God. If there are wicked people troubling your life, listen to David’s advice.

Delight yourself in the LORD. If your highest hopes and greatest joys are in the LORD, the LORD will give you your desires. There are two ways to look at that promise. One is that your desire for more of God and a closer relationship with Him will come to pass. If you are in Him, your enemies will find themselves fighting God. The other way to see this promise is that God will place His own desires in your heart so that you desire the things God desires. I think both are true.

If you dedicate your actions to God, walking in His ways, desiring what He desires, then you can count on God bringing this to pass. That spells trouble for your enemies and turns you from fear and fretting to joy and trust. The commitment of the heart is met by the enabling power of the God that transforms you.

Instead of fretting and getting all worked up, wait patiently in stillness before God. Don’t act without acting in Him and at His direction and you can know you will succeed. You will have the peace that guarantees the schemes of the wicked will ultimately be for your good. The final word will be a vindication of your righteous trust in God.

Consider: What should you do about the trouble facing you today? Delight yourself in the LORD, and commit your way to Him. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for Him.

**October 7 Evening**

Philippians 1:6,9-10 *6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

*9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,*

Paul certainly had a heart of love for the churches. Those believers were very precious to him. He is encouraging them with the fact that he is confident that God will carry on to completion what He started in their lives until Jesus returns. The Christians of that day had to deal with persecution. They must have wondered at times if they would stand strong. Paul reminded them that that it is God’s work, not just their own ability.

When I was a child, I would sometimes start something and then lose interest.

My father always told me to finish the task I started, or at least clean up my effort. God doesn’t leave things half done. He finishes what He starts. He has started to make you like His Son. He won’t lose interest or give up. He will finish the seemingly impossible task.

In this prayer, he was asking that God work into the Philippians’ lives an increasing love. He asked that their love increase in knowledge and depth of insight. As we grow in the love of God, we gain the ability to discern not just the good but the best. That discernment is part of the work God is completing in us.

Much of our battle in life is not choosing between the good and the bad. As we mature, that becomes more and more obvious. The real battle becomes how effective our lives will be for the Kingdom of God. Will we choose the best over what is good? That is the dividing line that will determine our fruitfulness. It will also determine how closely we follow the Lord. Paul says the answer lies in an increase in *agape* love. Pray for God’s love for your brothers and sisters, for the lost, and most of all, to love God with the kind of love with which He loves you. That is what will keep you from straying on the way to God’s finishing the work He started in you.

Prayer: Lord, please mature me so that I can discern the best, and help me follow through with that choice.

**October 8 Morning**

Psalms 40:6-8 *6 Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. 7 Then I said, "Here I am, I have come-- it is written about me in the scroll. 8 I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."*

The author of Hebrews quotes this passage and tells us it is about Jesus. He was reading the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the original Hebrew. There is a variation there, possibly a mistranslation in that Greek version. Instead of *“but my ears you have pierced*” it reads, *“but a body you prepared for me”* (Hebrews 10:5). Could it be a mistake? I believe every passage is inspired by God and that both expressions are true. The Son of God was given a human body through the womb of Mary. His ears were opened to God. In the tradition of a servant who chose to continue as a slave after his term of service was up, Jesus was a bondservant to the Father. The sign of the bondservant was the pierced ear. Both versions are applicable to Jesus.

The sacrifices the Jews made at the altar every morning and evening were merely a shadow of The Lamb to come. They were never what God desired for a covering of sin. Then the Son said to the Father, “Here I am, I have come.” The Lamb of God came into the world to be the sacrifice God desired to take away the sins of the world. It was prophesied throughout the Old Testament. Jesus said He had come to do the will of God. That is the expression of a bondservant. He came to do the will of the Father in shedding His blood for our sins. The Law of God was in His heart. He knew His objective because the Law outlined it clearly, “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.” God told the people of Israel He wanted to make them a nation of priests. There was only one way to do it. The heart of Jesus knew that He had to crush the head of the serpent but that in the process his heel would be wounded. Thank God! The Son desired to do the will of the Father for our salvation.

Consider: You had a body prepared for you also. Is your ear open to God? Is it pierced as the sign of a bondservant? Do you delight to do His will? Is His Law in your heart?

**October 8 Evening**

Philippians 1:20-23 *20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far…*

Paul was sitting in prison, unsure whether he will be released or be torn apart by lions. His concern was that Christ be exalted in his actions, whether released or executed. Some Christians had not stood up to the horrors of the coliseum, while others had honored Christ in their death. Paul expected and hoped that he would be among those who died in a way that would exalt Christ. Expectation mixed with hope is confidence in God while recognizing the weakness of the flesh. He knew God would help him, but he wasn’t going to say his flesh wouldn’t get in the way. He learned not to be overconfident in his own ability. None of us will know exactly how we will stand until the time is upon us.

If he lived, he would go on letting Christ express His life through him. If he died, he would go to his eternal reward and stand in the presence of the glorified Christ that he met on the road to Damascus. If he could make the choice, what would he choose? He knew that being released would give him the opportunity to lay up more treasure in heaven, to bear more fruit for the kingdom of God. He liked the idea of going home to be in the presence of Christ best. Still, he sensed the need to help the church grow.

In this dilemma, we can see a heart of love for God first, and the family of God second. His heart was in line with the great commandment. Is yours? Would Paul’s dilemma be yours? Most of us would long for our physical family, but not especially the family of God. Our role in the body of Christ would not be a key factor, nor would the desire to be with Christ our first desire. That is because our daily life is not Christ. When our daily life is Christ, our desires will be the same as those Paul exhibited.

Consider: The more Jesus lives in you, the more you will desire to be with Him in glory.

**October 9 Morning**

Psalms 42:1-3 *1As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? 3 My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"*

The words of the first verse have become one of the most popular choruses in the church today. In the song, it is used as an expression of desire to know God more intimately, but in the psalm it is a cry for deliverance from the psalmist’s situation. It is reminiscent of Job when he pleaded to present his case before God. We don’t know what his cause for being in distress was. It may have been when he fled from Saul, or Absalom, or an illness. There are dark valleys, through which God takes us, that increase our desire for God. No one likes to go down them, but oh the maturing of our soul that comes from the pain. We long for the presence of God to be our hiding place from the troubles of this life, but sometimes He even withholds that from us.

The dark night of the soul takes us from our apathetic level back up to climbing the heights of life in God. The pain draws us past our complacency and onward to heights of intimacy. The brokenhearted reading this can instantly relate to these words. Those who have not yet gone down this road, remember this, do not harden your heart in this place. If you do, you will come out bitter instead of better. The enemy of your soul will have won a double victory. He inflicted the pain and it will have borne the results that he desired. Instead, defeat him by allowing yourself to be even more tender and allowing your heart to break. The LORD is near the brokenhearted. It is a place where all your trust is on the faithfulness of God, though you cannot see any evidence. Those you have shared Christ with, who know you as a Christian will mock saying, “*Where is your God?*” He has promised to be near.

Remember: Weeping will endure for a season, but the joy will return. You will come out with a greater desire for God, for intimacy with Him.

**October 9 Evening**

Philippians 2:5-8 *5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!*

This is one of the most important passages in the letters from Paul. It is called “the emptying passage,” because it tells of Christ emptying Himself to become a man. The meaning of *“made himself nothing”* is debated, but all can agree that Christ left something behind to become man. In trying to plumb the depths of the doctrine presented, we miss the key point of the passage, the purpose for which Paul wrote.

Paul was pleading for unity among those in the church at Philippi. They had taken sides over two quite prominent women who were arguing. Paul began this chapter with the instruction to be of one purpose and *“in humility consider others better than yourselves.”* The passage today is an instruction to have the attitude Christ Jesus had. He was more spiritually mature than everyone He met, but He didn’t walk around in pride arguing.

He humbled Himself to become a man. Seeing He was in a body, He knew that He must become what humans were created to be, servants of the Most High. So, He listened to His Father and obeyed Him in everything. He did not exert His own opinion or will, but only that of His Father. The ultimate example of this submission was seen in the Garden of Gethsemane when He surrendered to the Father’s will, even death by Roman crucifixion.

Paul is commanding us to follow Jesus’ example. Live as servants of the Most High, humbly doing what He instructs. That will have us in the same mind and purpose, considering others better than ourselves. When the church has the attitude of Christ, we will bear fruit unto God. Unity will be obvious. God will be glorified.

Consider: A church of servants is the most powerful example of Jesus.

**October 10 Morning**

Psalms 45:6-8 *6 Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. 7 You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. 8 All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad*.

This psalm is by the sons of Korah. Korah had challenged God’s decision to have Aaron and sons be the priests. The earth opened up and swallowed him. His descendants, however, were still given the privilege to be musicians for the house of God. Many of the psalms were written by them. What an expression of the mercy of God! This psalm was a wedding song, possibly for Solomon. Just as in the Song of Songs, the theme moves from Solomon and his wife to Jesus and the church. Since Jesus is of the lineage of David, He is often referred to as The Son of David, and Solomon is in some respect a shadow of The Son of David who was to come.

We especially see the overlap in verse 6. It is God that is being addressed. His Kingdom is the one just Kingdom. He is the One who truly loves righteousness and hates wickedness. God anointed Christ Jesus with the oil of joy (Hebrews 1:8-9). The Biblical picture of Jesus is of One who is more joyful than all His disciples. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). As you grow in Christ’s likeness, you will find an increasing measure of joy.

His robes are fragrant. As we carry His life into the world, people get a whiff of the fragrance of the Lord (2 Corinthians 2:14). The music of strings makes Him glad. The abundance of worship music today is bringing gladness to the heart of Jesus. Don’t you love that thought? I hope this prophetic picture of Christ has changed your impression of the One we serve. He does weep for the lost. He does grieve with you in your trials and feels your pain. Yet, He knows the future, and He is the most joyful One you will ever meet.

Consider: The psalm goes on to speak of the bride. That is you and me! This is our wedding song! Savor it!

**October 10 Evening**

Philippians 2:12-13 *12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

When you came to Christ and repented of your sins and asked for forgiveness, you were saved. In God’s eyes, you have His very own righteousness. That is a done deal. It is so because of the finished work of Jesus. You are a new creation. Knowing that is all true, why do we not walk through this life in the same manner as Jesus did? He was a man with the righteousness of God.

The difference is that we have a sinful past and an old nature. We have ruts in our thinking, in our ideas, and in our patterns of behavior that are being transformed. The salvation that is in us must be worked out in experiences. Though my old nature has been given a deathblow, at any time I can take my spiritual foot off its throat and yield to its twisted interpretation of the world around me.

We must work out our salvation with fear and trembling, because we know the destructive seduction of the old nature. We know how subtle and cunning it can be. It is even capable of perverting good things, like worship, into depravity. No wonder we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We can so easily be utterly deceived.

We do have help though. God is working in us to will and act in ways that please Him. The old nature is always at war with our spirit, but our spirit has a powerful Helper. He helps us will what is good. That is half the battle. Just having correct desires is halfway to expressing the new life. But He helps with the second part too, the actions.

Remember: As you mature in the Lord, never let your guard down. Anyone, at any stage, can stumble with horrendous consequences. Let your mind be continually renewed, and cooperate with the work of God in you to will and act according to His good purposes.

**October 11 Morning**

Psalms 46:4-5, 10 *4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. 5 God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.*

*10 "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."*

Jerusalem is the city of God. It was the place God chose to dwell. His manifest presence was in the Temple behind the veil. Jerusalem is a shadow of the reality, the true city of peace, the people of God. He dwells in the hearts of His people, behind the veil of their physical bodies.

In Jerusalem there is no river. There is a valley where the Kidron flows when there are rains. The water for the physical city comes from an ancient well and from rain collected in cisterns. But in the real city of God there is a river. It springs up from the source. Isaiah foretold of this watering that would come from God and turn into an overflowing spring (Isaiah 58:11). He also foretold that when God’s people listen to the Word their peace would be like a river (Isaiah 48:18). Jesus stood in the Temple during a feast and invited all who were thirsty to come and drink from Him and experience streams of living water flowing from within them (John 7:37,38).

The city with such an abundant source of water is safe against the siege of the enemy. It will not fall. We will find God to be our help when the enemy attacks. And where do we find this water that makes us glad? Where is this Living Water to be obtained? “Be still, and know that I am God.” Wait in His presence to hear the words of Life that He would speak to you. When you do, drink deeply, and accept the peace and comfort that they bring. Know He is God over all, and nothing escapes from His sight.

Remember: Our conditions and our hearts are completely visible to Him. He will deal with the enemy in His perfect time, at the break of day. Be still, and know that He is God!

**October 11 Evening**

Philippians 3:8-10 *8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*

Paul had a lot of worldly things to boast about. His education was among the best. His discipline and pedigree were impeccable, but he considered it all to be garbage. He had learned that the things man is in awe of had only led him to deception. But he went on to say that he considered everything a loss when compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ. He didn’t just say it, but actually experienced the loss of all things in pursuit of knowing Christ more intimately.

Every work, every diploma, his genealogy, everything, he considered garbage! All he desired was to be found in Christ. In Him, there is a righteousness that is unattainable by any other means. Can you hear the passion in Paul’s writing to be right with God? He finally found the way to obtain the righteousness he sought. It was to be in the One who declared Himself to be the Way and who offered to exchange His righteousness for Paul’s sins.

Verse ten is a description of that passion. Read it again and again, and ask yourself if you have found that passion. It is a passion that is only derived from the Holy Spirit at work in us. It can’t come from any effort of man, or any instruction, or discipline. It is a work of grace in a heart that has been plowed deep with revelation from the Holy Spirit.

Consider: Can you say with Paul and all the saints that have laid down their rights to be found in Christ, “*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death…”*? If not, ask for God to work that desire into your heart. Ask that your heart be deeply plowed and all other desires to fall away. God will answer.

**October 12 Morning**

Psalms 51:4-6 *4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. 5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. 6 Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.*

When the prophet Nathan exposed King David’s sin with a parable, David wrote this psalm of repentance. He realized that though he had sinned against Bathsheba’s husband and the people of Israel, ultimately his sin was against God who had trusted him with position and authority. All sin is ultimately a sin against God who alone is the standard of righteousness. We sin against His goodness and grace. We sin against His mercy and love. Whenever His sentence is against us, He is perfectly justified in pronouncing it.

David declared that he was sinful from the time he was born. Unlike modern philosophy, David knew sin was in his very nature, inherited from Adam. Even from conception, rebellion against God was the driving force of his character. We want to believe that children are born innocent, but you never have to teach them to be selfish and rebellious. It is in their nature, as it is in ours. We need a Redeemer. We need a Deliverer.

It is God that teaches us truth in our minds and spirits. He shows us what is evil and cuts through all our justifications. His Spirit is the One who imparts wisdom. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. To recognize that God is just and will deal with sin, the inherited sin nature, and the sinful acts we yield to, gives us a healthy fear of God. Wisdom teaches us to come to God for cleansing for our actions and for who we are by nature. We are sinful from birth. Only God can change our nature. Are you a new creation in Christ Jesus? Have you accepted His sacrifice for who you are and for what you do?

Remember: The only appropriate response to such generosity is to make Him your Lord and God.

**October 12 Evening**

Philippians 3:12-14 *12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Paul had just declared that his one desire was to know Christ, the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering. Then he tells us that he is not there yet. This man had been a missionary to much of Asia Minor, suffered in beatings and shipwrecks, stoned and left for dead, chased out of town after town, and planted many churches, yet he said he had not attained it yet! So much for those who claim to have reached perfection! That is what heaven is for. This life is a continual process of moving in that direction, but the destination will only be reached when we are in His presence.

Paul declares that he presses forward to grasp that for which Christ Jesus took hold of him. Jesus took hold of him to put His own character in him by an increasing revelation of Himself to Paul. In this life, Paul continually pushed in that direction in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. He told us that he did that by forgetting the past and straining toward what is ahead. You can picture the prize just out of reach, or the runner who sees the finish tape. Giving it your all is the only thing that matters. Your entire focus is fixed on the goal.

The prize at the end of the race is knowing Christ. We know but a drop in an ocean. We see but a reflection on distorted glass. Then we will see face to face. If we don’t have this longing to know Christ in all His fullness, we are missing a key ingredient and motivation for pressing on in the Lord. He is more beautiful than you can possibly imagine. His love is more excellent than can be told. Is this the Christ you serve, or have you settled for duty? Do you run because you should, or because you are in love? Are you running to Him, or to some other goal that doesn’t come close to comparing? He is the prize that is worth giving up all else for.

Admonition: Run to Him, Christian! Reach for the prize.

**October 13 Morning**

Psalms 51:16-17 *16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

This is from David’s prayer of repentance after his sin was exposed. During the time between his fall into sin and the confrontation by Nathan the prophet, David must have gone to sacrifice to the Lord. All the singers he assigned were in place, lifting praises to God. He would have brought the priest the lamb or goat that was without blemish, and ceremoniously lifted his hands to heaven in prayer, as the sacrifice burned upon the altar. He may have even brought thank offerings and celebrated one of the feasts of the Lord, all the while knowing in his heart that he was a murderer and adulterer.

Once he finally faced how hard his heart had become, he realized that going through the motions was not what God was after. The motions and ritual did not ease his guilty conscience. What was God looking for? A broken heart! A contrite spirit! That was all that God would accept. The sacrifices were done but were not accepted, and David knew it. The lack of peace in his heart told him that God was after something else. Once he admitted his sin, his heart broke and he realized that brokenness was the real sacrifice. Now his future sacrifices would be accepted.

Have you felt that gnawing pain of your worship falling flat? Something in your heart is telling you that all is not well between you and God. You do everything you are supposed to but there is no intimacy between you and God. You don’t sense His acceptance. Check your heart. You don’t need a prophet to tell you. The Holy Spirit can point it out. Unforgiveness, bitterness, a complaining spirit, or some overt sin you hide from the world but justify in your mind may be the source of the broken relationship.

Action: Confess your faults one to another that you might be healed. To tell a trusted friend or advisor, to get it out of the darkness and into the light will help you forsake it and live.

**October 13 Evening**

Philippians 3:18-21 *18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

Two types of people are presented here, citizens of heaven and citizens of the world. There are those who love the cross and those who are enemies of its message. There are those whose destiny is destruction and those whose destiny is heaven. One has their mind on earthly things and the other is focused on heavenly things. One glories in shameful things and the other in godly things.

Some will try to stand between those two worlds, but it can’t be done. You will be drawn to one or the other. As children of God, we are to live lives that will attract the citizens of the earth, not confuse them. Sometimes the children of God will act as if the earthly has value. We speak the language of the earth. We act as if we are pleased with the things of the world. The citizens of earth need to see our desire is in another place.

We know that one day, everything will be under the control of Christ. That gives us great delight because we have come to know how gracious and good He is. Living as children of the light should help the citizens of earth see that.

Finally, our hope is in the transformation of these bodies, not in holding on to them. We desire the attachments to the worldly to pass away that our focus might be completely on Him. It is coming! Your transformation is at hand. Your lowly body will be like His. Then you will be able to know Him and the power of His resurrection. Then you will know life in all its fullness.

Consider: Realizing that transformation is coming loosens our ties with this life but strengthens our commitment to service while we are here.

**October 14 Morning**

Psalms 55:12-14 *12 If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. 13 But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, 14 with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God*.

The deepest pain is from betrayal by those we have placed our trust in, those who are closest to us. It was after three years of pouring into Judas’ life, and immediately after washing his feet as an expression of love that Jesus was betrayed by him. We hurt so much because we have such love for that person. We expected just the opposite from them. We sowed love, and we expected love in return.

This is one reason churches have such internal conflict. We sacrifice for one another with one goal in mind. We experience special times together, and from that conclude that our hearts are one in our mission and purpose. Then, someone becomes offended by something, intentional or unintentional. They begin to look for fault in the one who offended them. The offense may even have been an expression of love or a complete misunderstanding. Then the offended one offends. The wounds become deeper and the attitudes more bitter, until Satan has achieved his goal, division.

Once the cycle begins, there is only one way out. Unconditional forgiveness, expressed because of the supernatural love of God in our hearts. You can’t work it up or try hard to express it. It must come from God. Only His love can say of the ones driving nails into him, *“Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.”* We must see as he sees, that the battle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers and principalities. It is never personal, no matter how personal it seems. Division in the body of Christ is satanically inspired in the weakest. We can’t dismiss sin and leave it buried, for leaven will permeate the whole. We can love and forgive the weak one and encourage repentance and restoration.

Remember: Has someone offended you? Don’t let the cycle begin. Refuse to play Satan’s game. Do everything possible to restore your relationship with the offender, but begin by asking God for His love for that person.

**October 14 Evening**

Philippians 4:6-8 *6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.*

Here is the attitude of the Christian that has a living relationship with the Lord of the universe. They know God is sovereign over all things and loves them dearly. They know they are in the palm of His hand and that nothing can get to them without the Father’s permission. If things are difficult or painful, they know that good is coming from the experience and that the Father will see them through. What peace the child of God should have as they walk through this life!

When troubles come their way, they submit the offenders to God and seek His desired response for them. Once they have discerned the godly response, they act. Then they leave the rest in His omnipotent hands. This understanding and resolve allows God to give us His very own peace. It is peace for our heart, which means our desires are left with Him. It is peace for our minds. We don’t have to revisit the problem again and again, fretting with worry about what we should have done or can do in the future. Your heart and mind are kept in Christ Jesus. As He abides in your heart and mind, you yield to His desires and thoughts about your situation. Then your attitude will be entirely different from the flesh. This is when people truly see Christ in you.

Paul adds that we need to keep our minds on what is good. We must take control of our thoughts, dwelling on the things that are uplifting. The enemy of our soul wants us to dwell on the negative. That would be to declare that he has more power than God. Dwelling on the good says that God will prevail. That is the attitude most in tune with Christ, most in line with reality. This will affect your attitude about life, your countenance, and your health, not to mention your daily witness.

Consider: Children of God wear a smile, not because life is easy, but because they know everything is in their loving Father’s hands.

**October 15 Morning**

Psalms 56:2-4 *2 My slanderers pursue me all day long; many are attacking me in their pride. 3 When I am afraid, I will trust in you. 4 In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?*

There are times in life when it seems the whole world has unjustly conspired against you. Slander can turn your good reputation into one in which people unwittingly believe lies about you. Those who join together to bring you down have believed the slander and think they are serving a righteous cause. It is their pride that tells them they are more righteous than you, and therefore they must see that you are removed from the place of respect that your life has earned.

It can seem that life is out of control, that evil has a free rein. That is a fearful thought. If there is no justice, if lies can destroy the innocent, what hope is there of any kind of godly achievement in life? That would cause anyone to fear. But when we are afraid, we need to look to where all power truly lies. It is not in the power of slander. It is not in evil destructive powers, even though it may appear so at the moment. To God belongs power and might. Those who trust in Him are never disappointed. We turn to His unfailing promises and find faith that moves us beyond the present to the promised outcome.

When we see life from this perspective, we can say with David, “What can mortal man do to me?” He can lie, slander, and deceive; he can even beat and kill my mortal body, but all power and might belong to God. I will be eternally rewarded for my trust in Him. My enemies will either be conquered by Him, as I was, and become my brothers, or they will be punished for their rebellion against His love and truth. Every knee will bow! Either way, righteousness and truth will prevail. I can count on it. His Word has never failed and it never will.

Consider: When you are afraid, trust in Him. What can mortal man do?

**October 15 Evening**

Philippians 4:11-13 *11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*

Paul was expressing his gratitude for the financial support of the Philippian church. He didn’t want them to think that he was desperately in need, as if Christ did not supply his needs. Unlike some shameful ministers today who plead for finances, Paul said that he trusted God to give him whatever he needed. If he was in need, there was a purpose in it and something to learn. If he had plenty, there was also a purpose and something to learn.

Paul had learned one of the great lessons in life. He could be poor or wealthy and not have either influence his attitude and ministry. He could be well fed or hungry and still walk in the Spirit seeking first the kingdom of God. He knew God has a purpose in all things and all circumstances of life.

How could he focus so completely on the things of God, to the extent that his even need or plenty did not influence him? He learned to rely on the strength of Christ. Christians often quote verse 13 out of the context of the passage. It is used to say, “God can help me do anything!” Well, that may be true, but the passage is referring to God’s grace to do without, or to not let wealth influence attitude or decisions. That really takes the strength of Christ. Either is equally difficult, but in Christ we find the strength to face either circumstance.

Paul went on to say that God would be faithful to meet all the needs of the

Philippians with the riches in Christ Jesus (verse 19). When we are faithful to bless God’s servants, we can count on God meeting our needs. Don’t be afraid to give too much. Be more concerned that you are giving too little. Learn the lesson that God had taught the Apostle Paul, you can do everything through him who gives you strength.

Consider: Have you found the secret of contentment in all circumstances?

**October 16 Morning**

Psalms 63:1-3 *1 O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. 2 I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. 3 Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you*.

David had such an all-encompassing desire to be close to God, to be in His presence. In the 61st psalm he said he wanted to live in God’s tent forever. In the passage today he compares it to being thirsty and not being able to find water. He knew what that was like, living in Judah. The hill country had long dry seasons, and if the cistern you were counting on was dry, it was a long way to the next one. What is it we seek? What do we long for and how desperately?

He longed for the presence of God, because he had encountered God in worship in the sanctuary. At that time, the Tabernacle was still in use. The temple would be built by his son, Solomon. That tabernacle is probably God’s tent that David said he wanted to live in forever. There, in worship, he had an encounter with God that so captivated his soul that it became all he longed for. It was a vision of the power and glory of God. Have you had an encounter with God that has captured your desires? You can find it in His Word. You can find it as David did in worship. If you ask for it, with a motivation of wanting to desire God in a greater way, He will answer. You are praying His will.

What did David understand when he beheld the power and glory of God? He saw God’s love is better than life itself. He saw the love of God that passes understanding. As we see His love in a greater way, it births in us a greater love for Him because love begets love. His response to that revelation was to glorify God. The Apostle Paul prayed that the Ephesians would know the love of Christ in all its dimensions so that they might be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph 3:16-19).

Prayer: Lord, help me to know your love in all its dimensions.

**October 16 Evening**

Colossians 1:15-17 *15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

Paul had no doubts about the deity of Jesus. He understood that Jesus was the visible manifestation of the invisible God. Every manifestation of God throughout Scripture is Jesus Christ. God is a spirit, but when He is manifested, we are seeing Jesus in some form.

The place of firstborn is usually given to a firstborn son. Jesus is eternally existent with God, but He was born into the world of creation at a point in time through Mary. The firstborn is the heir of the Father, with a double portion of the inheritance. So, though everything is God’s, the double portion of inheritance belongs to Jesus. Our adoption as sons would give us a single portion of the inheritance. What is incredible is that Jesus is willing to share His inheritance with us, considering us His brothers.

This passage also declares Christ to be the instrument of creation. Everything that was made, everything that exists other than the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was made by Jesus. It was made for Jesus. The rebellion in the Garden only detracted for a moment in eternity, from the ultimate will of God. Everything will glorify the Son. There is no other possible outcome. He holds it all together. At His word it would all cease to exist.

At times, we forget the supremacy of Christ and grow concerned over our temporal situations. It helps us to go back and look at the big picture and realize that everything is in His hands. Everything will bring Him glory. The whole earth is filled with His glory.

Remember: No matter how powerfully present evil appears to you, it is passing. One word from Jesus will end it.

**October 17 Morning**

Psalms 66:10-12 *10 For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. 11 You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. 12 You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance*.

Becoming a Christian does not mean that all trials will cease and life suddenly become as smooth as it can be On the contrary, throughout Scripture we see God’s people enduring great trials that nearly crush them. Paul the Apostle promised that if we suffer with Him, we will reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:12).

What is this difficult life we are called to all about? God is refining us. In the Father’s eyes the work is done, but here on earth as we live out our day to day life, we find the old person we once were is trying to reestablish his ways in us. It was our familiar pattern, and one we would easily slip back into. Through the difficult situations we face, God shows us the old ways that we are tempted to cling to. If we try them again, we find they are contrary to our new life. It is like the refining of a metal. The heat brings up the lighter contaminants so that they can be removed. One old silversmith said that he knew when the silver refining process was finished when he could see his reflection in the silver. God is looking for His reflection in you.

In the end, God brings us out into a place of abundance. For many, that will not be in this life. You may have to wait for heaven. Oh, but what a place of abundance! Those who died in faith, and did not receive the promises in this life, go to a better reward (1 Corinthians 3:14-15). You are not alone in your suffering. Let the Comforter comfort you.

Consider the eternal great reward and endure by the grace of God. He will bring you out into a place of abundance!

**October 17 Evening**

Colossians 1:27-29 *27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. 29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.*

The prophets gave clues. Their words spoke of time when God would dwell among His people. They wrote of a transformed life. They told of a day when the Spirit of God would be poured out. Jesus clarified those ancient prophecies by saying that He would be back to make His home in those who obeyed Him. The apostles came to realize they were living in that day.

They came to realize the presence of Christ in them was what gave them the power and righteousness to live a life that glorified God. His presence in them was also their hope of glory in heaven. In the past, they had wondered about whether or not they had kept the laws, if they were good enough, or if their sacrifices were sufficient. But now they had the assurance of heaven through the presence of Christ in their hearts.

This is the sum of Paul’s teaching and doctrine: know Christ. If you are found in Christ, and He in you, you will be found perfect before God. Paul wanted to see as many as possible, by the grace of God, come to know the life transforming presence of Jesus Christ in their hearts. He was the power that motivated and led Paul to reach out to more and more. Christ’s love for those for whom He died drove Paul on.

Is the hope of glory living in you? Do you have that assurance of heaven because of His presence? If so, in what way is His energy at work in you to reach out to others that they might be found perfect in Christ? If not, realize what He has done for you and His plan for your life. Give up your ways and accept Him as your Master today. The questions will be replaced by His glorious presence in your heart. His energy in you will help you fulfill the purpose for which you were created.

Remember: His energy can work powerfully in you too.

**October 18 Morning**

Psalms 71:18-20 *18 Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come. 19 Your righteousness reaches to the skies, O God, you who have done great things. Who, O God, is like you? 20 Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up*.

What difficulties will old age bring? What fears do you have of aging? Perhaps you are already there. God is with you. Just as He has been every day of your life, and if you have been walking with Him, you may find greater assurance and peace in your old age. Several saints have said that in their old age they do not have as many signs of God’s presence because they had learned to walk by faith. Even so, He will not forsake you, even when your body lies in the grave. It is then that you will know it was worth every trial you endured.

The Psalmist asks for God’s presence for one reason, to pass on the stories of the power of God to the next generation. He wants to tell the testimonies of all that he has seen God do during his life, as well as the stories of his fathers. He wants all that will follow him to know of the power and might of God. He wants them to know of God’s perfect righteousness, incredible acts, and incomparable greatness. Is that your desire, to live to pass on the testimony of Jesus?

Yes, God has allowed you to see many bitter troubles, but they have all been used for your good, to mold you into the image of His Son. Your last battle will be death, but don’t fear. He has gone before you and defeated death. Your body will rise again, transformed, to meet your spirit in the air. You will forever be with the Lord. The Apostle told us to remind each other about this glorious end of the story. It helps us get through those many bitter troubles. It is a comfort to know it is all serving a great purpose with an ending that is beyond our wildest dreams. When we see Him we will be like Him for we will see Him as He is!

Encouragement: Endure, aged brother or sister in the LORD. The best is soon to come.

**October 18 Evening**

Colossians 2:6-8 *6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.*

The mystery that had been a secret for thousands of years was finally revealed. The Christ was to come as a man in Whom dwelt all the fullness of God, and yet die for our sins as our sacrificial lamb. Now that they knew the secret of the ages, having received Jesus as Lord, Paul encouraged them to continue to live in Him. Moment by moment we must decide whether or not we will abide in Him or return to reigning over our own lives. It helps to make the right choice when we realize the goodness of God in bringing this mystery to light and revealing it to our understanding.

More than merely living in Him, we need to sink down roots and grow strong in this new life. We know that the winds of adversity and temptation will come, so we should prepare for it. Go further today than you were yesterday in surrender, submission, and love. Grow stronger in your faith by exercising the faith you have been given. Learn more of the wonderful truths of Christ from His Word. Express your gratitude for all He has done for you frequently and at every opportunity.

There will always be false teachers who try to lure you back into letting the flesh reign. Their teaching can be cunningly clever, but you can recognize it by its similarity with human traditions and worldly principles. It certainly won’t be based on Christ, who is God’s only answer to the need of man.

Paul said false teaching takes you captive. If, like the Israelites, you wish to return to the old, someone will present you with a plan that can justify doing so. The only way to prepare yourself against such deception is to grow deeper in dependency on Christ. Live in Him. Sink down roots. Grow up strong in faith.

Admonition: Love Him more today than you did yesterday.

**October 19 Morning**

Psalms 73:24-26 *24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

In this beautiful poem, Asaph asks God why it seems the wicked have all the fun and never seem to pay the price. When he went into God’s sanctuary, he understood that in the end they will meet with justice. Asaph was troubled by how bad his attitude had been while envying the wicked. He said he was like a wild beast, only concerned about the physical.

Then he pondered the wonder of God loving someone with such impure and selfish motives. Why would God love someone so ignorant? Why does He stay with us and hold our hand? What a wonder that He would guide us with His counsel, and afterward receive us into glory! When we consider where we are coming from and where He is taking us, it is truly miraculous. Maybe, as the Apostle Paul implied, God picks the worst just to show how amazing His power is to transform us (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

Who do we have in heaven but God? There are those saints who have gone before us, but God so outshines them in all that He is and in all has done for us, that He stands alone as our greatest desire. How could we want anything greater? Everything the earth could offer pales by comparison. Do you have such a vision of God? Has He captured all your hearts desires? Or are you still trying to find something on the earth that satisfies?

Our strength and health will fail. These bodies are designed for a designated period upon this earth, but there is more to life than these bodies. The Lord is the strength of our life. Every day the king’s household was served their allotted portion of food. It may have been something like a loaf of bread, a piece of meat, and two cups of wine. In this psalm, Asaph declared that the LORD is his portion, forever. What do we receive for serving the King? Christ Jesus today, Christ Jesus tomorrow, Christ Jesus forever!

Remember: You will never grow tired of Jesus being your daily portion.

**October 19 Evening**

Colossians 3:1-3 *1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

When we come to Christ as our Savior, we recognize the crucifixion of our sinful nature with Him on the cross. We also consider ourselves to have risen with Him to newness of life. Baptism is a picture of those experiences. Going under the water is our burial with Him in death. Coming up out of the water is the picture of being raised to new life in Him.

Since that should be true of everyone who is in Christ, we then must set our hearts on things above. This is an imperative command. It is not something that just happens naturally. It is an action that you must take. Of course, the Holy Spirit will direct and help you to do that. Without the indwelling presence of Christ, it would not be possible. We are to intentionally set our desires on heavenly things, on pleasing the Father, on heavenly rewards, and on eternal substance. Christ is there at the helm of the universe directing all things to be brought together under His rule.

We are also directed to set our minds there as opposed to earthly things. When we focus on the temporal, our perspective becomes distorted. Only by fixing our minds on the eternal will we have the right perspective and desires. This, too, takes an effort on our part, and is only possible through the power of the Spirit at work in us. For most of us, this transformation of our thinking will make more of a change in our lives than any other practical step. Before we came to Christ, we formed ruts in our thought patterns that were ungodly and destructive. We must recognize them for what they are and refuse to go down the old paths. We must consciously replace those thoughts of the temporal with that of the eternal. The more we set our thoughts there, the easier it becomes as we develop godly thought patterns.

Consider: If your life is in Christ Jesus, have you intentionally set your desires and thoughts on things above? What areas have you ignored? What will you commit to today so that you will set you heart and mind above?

**October 20 Morning**

Psalms 84:10-12 *10 Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. 11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. 12 O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you*.

Psalm 84 is called “the pearl of the psalms.” It is neatly divided into three sections, each ending in “Selah.” The first section is about the desire to come near to God. The second section is about the journey to the Temple. The third is arriving in the Temple of God. The Jews most likely sang this as they journeyed to Jerusalem to participate in the feasts of the LORD.

The psalmist loved to be in the Temple. He said that just one day there was better than a thousand anywhere else. The Temple today is the body of believers, the body of Christ. Do you so desire genuine fellowship like the psalmist who longed to be in the Temple? He wished he was one of the Levites assigned to keep one of the gates of the Temple. To him, that was better than any pleasure the world could offer. Where do you consider true pleasure to be found? If it is hard for you to relate to the psalmist desire, perhaps you need to ask the LORD for a clearer revelation of genuine fellowship in the presence of God and the horror of the end of this world’s pleasures.

He goes on to say that the LORD God is a sun and shield. The sun is the source of life. It provides the energy from which our planet derives all energy. God is the source of all strength and life. He shields us from the onslaught of the enemy of our soul. He brings good things into our lives. In fact, every good and perfect gift is from the Father of lights (James 1:17).

The psalm ends declaring the blessedness of the man who trusts in God. Where is your trust placed for the activities that lay before you today? Are you trusting in self to get things done, to provide, to meet your family’s needs? If so, you are not going to find the peace in your heart that the psalmist is speaking of. But if you are trusting in the Maker of heaven and earth, you will be blessed.

Remember: No matter what comes your way, in Him there is joy, peace and true blessing!

**October 20 Evening**

Colossians 3:15-17 *15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

The beginning of verse 15 could literally be translated, “Let the peace of Christ umpire your heart.” Most Christians struggle with knowing the will of God for their lives. Here is an excellent guideline. If the question in your heart is not clearly answered in God’s Word, what does the Holy Spirit have to say about it? Is there a sense of calm and peace that prevails as you walk in the Spirit, or are you in inner turmoil over the issue? The lack of peace is the umpire, the Holy Spirit, saying “Out!” The fruit of the Spirit is peace, so when peace is not there, you know that you need to check where you have missed God’s will.

Both verse 15 and 16 tell us to let something happen. Let the peace of God rule in your heart. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, there are steps we must take for our spiritual growth. These two commands are not so much actions we take as influences we are to welcome. When the Spirit directs us in the paths of peace or speaks to us through the Word, we are to welcome and cooperate with those influences.

I don’t know if the first century church struggled over music, but these three expressions for songs seem to cover all the bases. Whatever type of music we prefer, all our music should have the Word of God richly influence the words. The songs should speak of our gratitude for all God’s goodness.

Finally, he instructs them to speak and act with the authority of our Lord Jesus. Every part of our life should be in His name. Only His gracious redemption and transformation of us, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, makes this effective life possible. That is why we should always thank Him as we walk in the Spirit.

Consider: What is the Umpire’s call in regard to decisions before you today?

**October 21 Morning**

Psalms 89:30-33 *30 "If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, 31 if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, 32 I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; 33 but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness.*

In this psalm about God’s promises to David, we see in a shadow God’s promises to the “Son of David”, Christ Jesus. We are His offspring, His seed, in Biblical terms (Isaiah 53:12). In type then, we see God’s attitude toward us when we sin. We are still sons, but God is neither indulgent nor ruthless. He will not let us go on without dealing with our sin, but He does not deal with it in a way that would crush us or cause His heart to turn from us.

That flogging often goes ignored by us at first. We chalk it up to circumstances, refusing to examine our hearts. When it comes to our own heart, we can be our worst deceiver and the most gullible of fools. We seem to find a justification for anything we wish to indulge in. Meanwhile, the heart of our Father aches, knowing He is going to have to afflict us in a more serious way to get us to open our eyes.

When that happens, we cry out and ask, “Where is the God of love we once knew?” His love is still with you, but it is being expressed in faithfulness to turn you from the sin you refuse to admit is clouding your heart and judgment. Through it all, He weeps with you, hurts with you, as any loving father would when dealing severely with his own children. Thank God for His faithful love, even when it comes in the form of painful discipline. He loves you enough to not allow you to go on deceiving yourself.

Thank Him for His loving discipline that keeps you from self-destruction.

**October 21 Evening**

Colossians 4:2-5 *2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.*

What does it mean to devote oneself to prayer? What would you say you are devoted to? Paul encouraged the Colossians to make that kind of life commitment, watching for God’s instructions, and expressing thanks for all His goodness.

In that devotion to prayer, Paul asks that his team be remembered. He asks for prayers for a door to open for the message they were proclaiming. This is an essential prayer for all those who preach. Unless God opens the doors of hearts to hear, our labor will produce few results.

He also asks for prayers that he might proclaim it clearly. Spiritual truths must be expressed in words. The preacher’s ministry is to find the right words so that the message will be clear and understood. Pray that your pastors have a door opened for their message and for their ability to express it clearly. You have a part in their ministry when you pray in this way.

Paul asked the Colossians to be wise in the way they acted toward those outside the family of faith. What a need we have for this today! We lose the opportunity to share the Gospel when we needlessly offend unbelievers. We must act in wisdom, realizing that God may give us an opportunity to speak the truth to them. Every person we meet we must consider as a potential child of God seeking the truth. Our actions and speech should always represent Christ.

Consider: Though our passage today has two differing topics, they are united under one great concern. They have in common God’s desire to reach the lost with the good news of His Son. If we share His concern for them, our prayers, words, and actions will express that concern.

**October 22 Morning**

Psalms 91:1, 4 *1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.*

*4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.*

This psalm is a favorite of many people. Contemporary songs have been written with the idea it presents. The idea of being under the wings of God, like chicks under the shadow of a mother hen’s wings runs throughout Scripture. It is a beautiful metaphor full of meaning. We should not look too deeply or make too many analogies from the picture, but a few are quite obviously intended.

First, we need to seek that nearness to God. A mother hen will give a certain call to her chicks when there is danger, and the ones with any common sense will immediately run for the cover of her wings. God has given us that call in His Word. The Devil is like a roaring lion roaming about looking for those He can devour. The call has been given. Are you using your common sense to respond by running for the shelter of wings of the Most High? To dwell (abide) there is really the only safe place to live.

We need to experience a constant living there under His shelter. Some refer to this lifestyle as “practicing the presence of God” or “abiding in Christ.” It is the one way to live in the rest of God. He has invited us to experience His Sabbath rest, but with the enemy on the prowl, the only way to experience the rest is to live in the shadow of His wings.

There are several comforting names of God used here. Most High is the Hebrew *Elyon,* the God above all gods, or Lord of lords. The other is *Shadday* translated ‘Almighty’. This is no ordinary hen. Satan dare not mess with this mother hen. Nothing stands a chance against this One.

Remember: Let His wings of His faithfulness be your protection, your place of rest. Live in His shadow. Abide in Christ.

**October 22 Evening**

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 *15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*

The Thessalonian church was worried about those who had died. They thought that the return of Christ would come before their death. Paul told them that what he is about to share came from Jesus’ lips. Peter, or one of the other apostles, must have shared this with Paul. We don’t find it in the Gospels. If Paul had not relayed it to this church, we wouldn’t know the encouraging truth found here.

He wrote that Jesus had explained that some would die before His return. The believers that are living would not be taken up before those who had died. Here is the order: the Lord comes down from heaven; He gives a loud command; an archangel gives a shout; the trumpet of God sounds; the dead in Christ rise; we are caught up with the risen believers; then we all meet the Lord in the air never again to be separated from His glorious presence.

Paul wrote that they should comfort one another with these words. We are going to meet Christ together with those we love who died. If we should die before Jesus’ return, we will be with those who rise. We have a glorious hope. No other faith has such strong assurance and promise. It should be a great comfort to us.

Christians debate about whether our spirit is present with the Lord when we die, or whether we enter into a waiting mode like sleep. Paul wrote that to die is to be present with the Lord (Philippians 1:23). The verse just preceding our passage for today tells us God brings the departed souls with Him. What rises is the bodies of the saints that sleep in the dust that are transformed. Death is not the end for us. It is merely the door to a glorious eternity.

Remember: Life here is short. Live in the light of eternity.

**October 23 Morning**

Psalms 100:2, 4-5 *2 Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs*

*4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. 5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

Our worship should be a joyful event. The LORD desires that we worship with gladness. That does not mean that we will never be downcast or troubled, but when we come to worship Him, to turn our eyes from the world to our great God, it should fill our hearts with joy. There is an answer to the world’s condition. That should be our joyful song of worship.

As they entered the gates of the Temple, they were to enter with thanksgiving. Even in the worst of personal or national situations, God has still blessed you with life, breath, and so many good things. Prayer is coming into the heavenly temple. When we come, we need to come thanking God for His goodness in our lives, before we present our burdens. They were to enter the courts of the LORD with praise. When we come together in our churches or in united prayer, praise should always be the first thing from our lips. If we could see in the spirit, we would see our blessings far outweigh our troubles. In case we didn’t get the point, the psalmist repeats the theme, “give thanks to him and praise His name.”

Then he tells us why. The LORD is good. It is not the LORD who has brought evil into your life. If it is chastening from the LORD, it is for your eternal good. Only good comes from His hands to his children. That is because His love endures forever. You may have turned from Him, ignored His love, broken His heart, but His love endures forever. In every generation, He is faithful. That is why you should come to Him with praise, with joy and gladness. If He was in the least bit different, or changed, you might have reason to be gloomy, but He is the LORD. He never changes. That is something to be joyful about regardless of present circumstances.

Remember: You can count on His love! Come to Him with a thankful heart of praise today!

**October 23 Evening**

1 Thessalonians 5:16-19 *16 Be joyful always; 17 pray continually; 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not put out the Spirit's fire;*

Several times in the letters of the New Testament, the author gives a list of present, active, imperative commands. The verb tense in Greek tells us that each of these instructions is something we must do now. Right now and always we are to be joyful. It is a fruit of the Spirit. Joy does not mean that we are happy. How could you weep with those that weep and be happy? Joy is something much deeper than your present emotional state. It is the sense that comes when you believe that all is in the hands of your loving Father. Joy in difficult circumstances is a powerful testimony to the reality of your faith.

The next instruction is to pray continually. People often ask how this is possible. If you mean to isolate yourself and speak out loud to God without stopping, it is impossible. If it means to walk in constant heart to heart communion with God; it is the life of the Christian. Jesus should be our closest friend with Whom we share the moments of each day. A constant sharing with Him and listening to His voice will keep you walking in the Spirit.

God’s will for us is that we give thanks in every circumstance. Everyone knows this is impossible without a radical commitment to walk by faith and not by sight. How can we thank God for loss and pain? It is only possible when we trust that He will work out everything for good. Giving thanks changes our perspective and cuts short the damage that the enemy intends.

The commands go on, but the last one for today is to not quench the Spirit’s fire. The Spirit of God will cause you to share His passion for certain needs you come in contact with. Don’t squelch that. Don’t harden your heart to His leading. Go with it. He is encouraging you to step out and meet that need in His power. The reason we throw water on that fire is that we know it will cost us. Worrying about the cost is a carnal perspective. The godly perspective is that it is an opportunity to be an instrument of God, pleasing His heart, and laying up treasure in heaven.

Remember: Be joyful; pray always; give thanks; yield to the Spirit.

**October 24 Morning**

Psalms 103:10-12 *10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us*.

These songs of praise are rich with teaching. In this psalm, the writer tells us a fact we need to remember. We never get what we deserve. Never ask for justice, or you may get it. We always forget our sins and remember our good deeds with a little embellishment. If we got what we deserve, we would all be cast into the Lake of Fire. We are by nature rebels against the loving goodness of our Creator. Instead of giving us what we deserve, God lavished His love upon us by sending His one and only Son to take what we deserved. Only Jesus could bear it.

How did we ever learn to fear Him, that is, to reverence His just nature that will not let sin go unpunished? It is only an undeserved gift of grace! It is an expression of His great love. That love is much greater than you or I could ever muster. What is your attitude toward those who have betrayed your love for them? God just continues to love us to the fullest extent of His love.

Satan would try to get us to dwell on all our failures and past mistakes. God doesn’t, so why should we? Satan’s accusations are true, but so is the fact that those sins are covered by the sacrifice of Jesus. They are removed from us as far as east is from west. That is a long ways! Next time the enemy tries to get you down about a past sin, remind him of this verse. The future is as bright as the promises of God. You are a work in transition, but the scrap that has been chiseled away is already cleaned up and hauled off.

Remember: Look forward, not back, and praise God for loving you so! Praise Him for sending Jesus to bear what you deserved.

**October 24 Evening**

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 *23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.*

Paul concluded his letter to the Thessalonians with a summary of all that he has been expressing in detail. His desire is that God sanctify them completely. To sanctify is to set apart for the sole use of God. It means to be holy. The verb tense is aorist, active, optative. Expanding that meaning, we might translate in the following way. It is my desire for something that may never come to completion, that is that God, having begun to purify you for Himself, might continue to do so.

The optative mood had almost disappeared from usage at the time this was written. It indicates a desire for an action to occur in which the fulfillment is doubtful. Yet, Paul added that the One who called them is faithful and will do it. Paul mentioned in the letter to the Philippians that he had not yet attained perfection. But this is what God is faithfully doing in our lives. It is God who is at work sanctifying you. Though Paul has just listed a number of commands that are helpful in the process, it is a work of God.

This passage mentions the three parts of man. Paul is praying that each be sanctified completely. The spirit is the place in us that is born to new life and communion with God. Without the new birth, this part of us is void and empty. The soul is our mind, will, and emotions. If we let the Spirit direct our lives from within our own spirit, our soul will submit to and serve Him. But when the soul is leading, we will walk in our carnal nature. The sanctification of the soul means complete identification with the Spirit’s thoughts, desires, and emotions. As that is increasingly complete, the body then acts in accordance with the sanctified soul. Our actions are the final expression of the completeness of the sanctification process. That is why Jesus declared that you can know a tree by its fruit (Matthew 7:20).

Consider: Don’t get discouraged if you are just beginning the process, God is the One at work faithfully completing what He started.

**October 25 Morning**

Psalms 105:5 5 *Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,*

Psalms 106:12-13 12 *Then they believed his promises and sang his praise. 13 But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel.*

How soon we forget. God is always working in our lives, but sometimes it is very evident. There is no way we could deny it. That is when we believe Him, and doubt is the farthest thing from our minds. We sing a song of praise. We make vows that we intend to fulfill.

We should believe without the miracles, or seeing His hand against our enemy. We should know He is capable of healing, even if He chooses not to. But we are weak and easily swayed by our circumstances. When the miracle is fresh, when the healing has occurred, then we are totally convinced. But how soon we forget.

We are no different than the Children of Israel who sang praise for an incredible rescue one day, and murmured and whined the next. What is wrong with us? We have a sin nature! What can we do about it? We take the sin nature to the cross, but we so readily take it back up again. God tells us to remember what He has done. Keep a journal. Flag those days in which God moved. Review those times when His presence was so real that you could touch Him. Write down the words He spoke to your heart and review them often.

When Joshua led the Children of Israel across the Jordan at flood stage, the LORD had him make a memorial mound of stones. When someone in the future asked about that pile of rocks, they were to tell them about the mighty power of God that stopped the river at flood stage so that all could cross. You probably need to make a few memorial mounds to remind you of the Jordans God parted for you.

Pass on to your children and grandchildren the things God has done in your life. Leave a written legacy of the mighty works of God. Most will not care much about the details of your life, but reading about God’s intervention in your life will give them hope and faith to see Him working in their life.

Remember the mighty works of God. It will keep the fire in your heart stoked. It will inspire future generations.

**October 25 Evening**

2 Thessalonians 2:9-11 *9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie…*

The Thessalonians were concerned that perhaps they had missed the Second Coming of Christ. Paul told them that there would be a falling away first and that the man of sin would be revealed. Then he went on to tell them what that would be like. He called him the lawless one and said that Satan would work to produce counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders. He will work in such a way as to give those who refuse the truth something to believe in. This method has always been at work, but it will reach a crescendo before Christ’s return.

If people refuse the truth, God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie. To believe in and love the truth and become a son or daughter of God is a wonderful privilege. Those who refuse to do so, those who reject the gift of salvation, will be given something they can believe in.

It happens today in a less obvious way. There are many false religions that allow you to remain on the throne of your life and yet give you a false sense of spiritual growth. These religions are based on pride and selfishness. Man desires to cling to these two vices more than any other. Satan has custom designed lies that feed these desires. Those who refuse to love the truth readily accept them.

It can also happen in small ways in the believer’s life. When the Spirit points out an area we have not given over to the lordship of Christ, we can make excuses and even come up with reasons why it is alright to stay in control. God allows this for a time, but He will continue to confront it in every believer until we face the truth.

Consider: Those who refused to love the truth are given a lie. Those who love the truth are continually confronted until they face the lies that remain.

**October 26 Morning**

Psalms 110:1-3 *1 The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." 2 The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies. 3 Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy majesty, from the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth*.

This was the most quoted verse of Jesus. There are two different words for lord. The first (all capital) is Jehovah, the eternal God. The second is Adon, the Master. The conversation between God and Jesus is overheard and recorded by the psalmist. Eternal God says to Lord Jesus to sit at His right hand until He makes all His enemies a footstool. The Jews thought the second lord was referring to David.

It was most quoted during the last few days of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Jesus was looking forward to the promise of His Father, sitting at His right hand, watching God’s sovereign will bring everything in submission to the Son. You and I are watching too, as the world does its best to have man make heaven on earth but without success.

Verse 2 promises that Jesus ruling scepter will go out from Zion and throughout the enemy camp. When He returns to reign, he will not come as the humble servant. He will come as the majestic Lord of glory, and we will follow as warriors in our prime, enforcing His rule in the earth. Perhaps Jesus quoted this so often because He wanted us to look forward too, and to understand that this transition period is only for a short time. With our eyes set on this future, we have a very different perspective of our present. Our destiny is to rule and reign with Him in righteousness. All the troubles of our present day will be past.

Consider: The world will see with their own eyes the glory of the Lord of all the earth. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord!

**October 26 Evening**

1 Timothy 1:14-16 *14 The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. 16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.*

Paul considered himself to be a trophy of God’s grace. His letters to Timothy were among his last letters written. Early on in his ministry he described himself as the least of the Apostles (1 Corinthians 15:9). Midway into his ministry he said he was the least of all God’s people (Ephesians 3:8). Here at the end of his ministry he declares himself to be the worst sinner.

Maturing in Christ means an increasing revelation of our sinfulness. At first we don’t see ourselves as being so bad. We know we are in need of Jesus, but we almost think God made a good choice when He picked us. As we grow, the Spirit reveals more and more of our pride and selfishness. We start to wonder why God would choose us. Then, as our revelation of His holiness increases, we realize that we are the worst of sinners. We start to see that it is all about His glorious grace. He takes the worst and transforms them into the image of His Son. What an amazing God! How else could we understand how gracious and merciful He is?

Paul said God does this so that we can see His unlimited patience. I thank God for His unlimited patience! Everyone that sees a saint in progress should be attracted to the gracious loving God that would even choose that person.

Consider: Where are you in the process of the revelation of your condition without Christ? Has humility become your robe that attracts those who see it to the gracious God that is doing the work in you? Every transformed life is a testimony to unbelievers that God can save them too.

**October 27 Morning**

Psalms 116:12-13 *12 How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? 13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD.*

God is good! When I am in touch with reality enough to see how good God has been to me, I am convicted to respond in some way. A vision of the goodness of God only comes by the grace of God. Left to ourselves, we would only focus on what was not pleasing us at the moment. The flesh is extremely negative and loves to be critical. But when the grace of God opens our eyes for a moment, when He breaks through that veil of darkness that our carnal nature casts over our vision, then we see His great goodness. Once we see it, we are overwhelmed with wonder that He could be so good to rebellious creatures like us.

Then we start to think about the appropriate response. If someone lavished upon you sacrificial goodness, after you have ignored their attention a thousand times before, if your heart is somehow enabled to see the love that prompted all that goodness, you want to respond. Take a moment to look at the cross. See Him hanging there in agony for YOU? Now open the eyes of your spirit and see Him standing in front of you with His nail pierced hands stretched out to receive you into His loving embrace. How will you respond?

Take the cup of salvation! Drink every last drop. Call on His name, Jeshua, salvation of Jehovah! “Save me, cleanse me, make me wholly Yours. Fill me, change me, use me as You will. I give you this life that has lived selfishly up till now, to do with as You will.

Consider: That is my only appropriate response to all the goodness the Lord has lavished upon me. *I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD.”*

**October 27 Evening**

1 Timothy 2:5-6 *5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time.*

Man always tries to step into the role that is reserved for Christ alone. Fortune telling, speaking to the dead, or any other means of communing with God than through Christ Jesus are all subverting the role of our one mediator. Cult leaders steal this role with devastating consequences to those who allow them in that position. God wants to speak personally with you through His Son.

Under the Old Covenant, the prophet and priest stood in this intervening place. Because the Spirit of God was not poured out to all men, those who had the Spirit upon them spoke in the place of God. Though the gift of prophecy is in the church today, the office of prophet ceased with John the Baptist (Luke 16:16). Now that the Spirit is poured out, we are all called to be priests. We can all come boldly to the throne of grace. The Holy Spirit can speak directly to us. You don’t need a prophet to tell you what God is saying, for your mediator is Christ alone. The gift of prophecy may confirm what the Spirit is speaking to your heart, but it is not the infallible word of God. We are to test all prophecy to see that it lines up with the Word. The Word has been made flesh, Jesus, our mediator.

What a wonderful mediator we have! If you are in trouble with another person, you want someone who is impartial, yet, you want someone who has your best interest at heart. Sin makes us all in trouble with God, yet our mediator, Christ Jesus, is ever present before God, interceding on our behalf. You couldn’t ask for a better mediator. He paid our debt for us so that we could be right with the Father. Now He mediates our prayer requests. He intercedes for our spiritual growth. He presents requests according to the perfect will of God in order that we might be found faultless at the Day of Christ.

Consider: Jesus is the only Mediator that God accepts. He is the One who shares the Father’s heart. Thank the Father for providing the perfect mediator.

**October 28 Morning**

Psalms 118:6-8 *6 The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? 7 The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies. 8 It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.*

We have come to the center of the Bible. Here is the core of it all. The LORD is with those who call on Him in truth. If the Creator of heaven and earth is with you, what have you to fear? Throughout Scripture, God’s promise to those who sought Him was, “I will be with you.” As long as the LORD is with us, we can be certain that things will turn out in the end. Emmanuel, God with us. It is an incredible thing that God would dwell with man, but He always has and He always will, for He has set His love on us.

The world will always look to man, man’s wisdom, man’s counsel, and man’s strength. That often sets believers at odds with the world. But why fear or be concerned? What is the worst man can do to you? As the Apostle Paul said, (forgive my loose paraphrase) “If you kill me, I get to go home to be with Jesus. If you beat me, I just keep laying up treasures in heaven. Take your pick, either way the LORD is with me and I get blessed.”

The enemies of the LORD will be defeated, but even now, I am more than a conqueror. I’m a mega-conqueror, because the LORD is with me! Because He is with me I have the victory in life and in death. You can trust in men if you want, but that is a sucker bet. He will lose in the end, guaranteed. Or you can trust in the LORD. That is a guaranteed win. What is your situation in life today? Where are you placing your trust? I hope it is not in man and man’s best, even if that man is you. The old expression, “You can only trust yourself,” is pretty pathetic.

Remember: Trust in God! Let Him be your helper. Let go of fear, and watch the God of all creation show you His ways.

**October 28 Evening**

1 Timothy 6:8-10 *8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*

What a difficult truth for us to hear. Our modern world constantly bombards us with advertising of all the wonderful possessions we could have if we only made more money. How many gamble away their money as they pray for the jackpot that they swear would not change them? The history of lottery winners is a sad testimony to the truth of these verses. And how many believe they are called to be rich so that they can minister to the rich? *If we have food and clothing, we will be content*. Paul did not think it was necessary to be rich, and he witnessed to business owners and kings.

He warns us that the desire to get rich will cause us to fall into temptations and a trap and harmful desires that will destroy us. If you believe this to be divinely inspired, why would you want to go that direction? The desire for the world still has a hold on what you see as valuable. “But I would use it for God’s kingdom!” Yes, a very few are called down that difficult path. There is a difference between using your gifts of financial ability and desiring to be rich. You must examine your heart with all sincerity to know the difference. It may be easier to examine what you do with the wealth to know the answer. If the most of it goes into building bigger barns, you may be fooling yourself.

Money is not the root of all kinds of evil, the love of it is. It is a painful path filled with lessons on the vanity of things without God’s blessing. It is self-inflicted pain. Hear the lonely cry of the wealthy. They have tried to fill their emptiness with vanity and found it all unfulfilling. Pray for them to find the real treasure, Christ Jesus. Pray that you withstand the alluring temptation of wealth and see it for what it really is. Pray for God’s people who are wealthy to keep their hearts set on true wealth.

Consider: If you were granted one request, would you ask for true wealth, or the temporal wealth of this world?

**October 29 Morning**

Psalms 119:9-11 *9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. 10 I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. 11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in our Bible. It is believed to have been written by Ezra during the restoration period, when the Jews returned to Israel from Babylon. The entire psalm is about the Word of God. Each section is entitled with a Hebrew letter, and each verse in that section begins with that letter. Every verse mentions the Word of God in some form.

Ezra asks how it is possible for a young man to keep his way pure. Youth are changing physically and have little experience to know how to deal with those changes. The world today is of no help. It encourages them to sin against God and not consider it wrong to do so. What would your advice be to a young man who wanted to serve God in all his ways? The Holy Spirit says that the one way is by living according to God’s Word. There must be time spent in God’s Word and the contemplation of what it is saying. That must be accompanied by desire to keep what one hears from the Word. But that alone is not enough. The next verse shows us that even though we seek God with all our heart, we need to ask God to keep us obedient to what we have heard. “God, don’t let me stray from your commands. I understand what You are saying, but I need Your help. I recognize that without Your help I would not be able to do it.”

But the author didn’t just leave it at that. He memorized what God was saying to Him. He kept the words like a hidden treasure locked in his heart, brought out to enjoy and examine often. Each day you can take a treasure from your morning time with God and place it within your heart to help guide you through the day. Carry those verses in your mind. Share them with friends. Let the Word be the thought that is the backdrop of your whole day. Sin will keep you from the Word, or the Word will keep you from sin.

Challenge: Young person, or old person with a young heart, take time to gather treasure to take with you through each day. Make some of them a part of your permanent collection by committing them to memory.

**October 29 Evening**

1 Timothy 6:11-12 *11 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

Paul had just warned Timothy about the destructiveness of the desire for riches. Then he told Timothy what he should be pursuing. First, he referred to him as a man of God. Do you think of yourself as a man or woman of God? How would it feel if someone referred to you in that manner? It should cause us to pause and consider our high and holy calling. Pursuing money is an unworthy goal for a man or woman of God. He may bless you with wealth, but there are more important things to pursue. Men and women of God are to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Those attributes are worth pursuing. They are worthy goals for God’s children.

What does a life pursuit of those attributes look like? Would you say those are the things you are pursuing? How important is gentleness to you? Endurance? Godliness? Do you work at attaining the manifestation of these attributes like a money hungry person pursues financial success? Does it occupy your thoughts and creep into your conversation, like get rich ideas always pop up in the greedy person’s speech?

We are in the fight of the ages over who will receive our worship. Fight the good fight of faith. Keep your eyes fixed on what is really worth living and dying for, the Lord Jesus Christ. Take hold of eternal life. Don’t just hope your sinner’s prayer will get you a free pass to heaven; grab hold of life right now! If it isn’t worth living for now, why would you want to spend eternity living in it?

When we first came to faith, we made some kind of public confession, whether it was baptism or a testimony (Romans 10:10). Are we still living like we have committed our lives to God’s hands as we declared we did?

Remember: Take hold of life today like you did the day you were saved.

**October 30 Morning**

Psalms 119:67, 71 *67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.*

*71 It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.*

There are times when we need affliction, be it physical, mental, or emotional. If it is indeed good for us, as the psalmist here declares, we should be careful not to ask to be delivered from it too soon. We are to pray for the healing of one another, yet we need to discern God’s timing for that healing. Some would consider all afflictions the work of Satan that must be rebuked and immediately healed. There are times when Jesus healed all, that is, all that came to Him (Luke 6:19). There are other times when He walked through a crowd of sick folks to pick out one person that was to be healed (John 5:3).

When we are afflicted we should look for a lesson to be learned or an insight to be gained. We learned from Job that even though Satan may bring the affliction, God uses it to reveal Himself to us. It may be a time of stretching your faith and trust in God. It may be an opportunity to be still and learn in what ways your decisions have varied from God’s leading.

In this passage, the psalmist implies he was not obeying the Word of God. His illness was due to his straying away from God’s Word. So when we are ill, we should look to see if our lives are lining up with the Word of God. In the second verse, he said the affliction was good for him, because through it he learned what God had decreed. Our lives often get in such a busy state that we tend to run on autopilot. An affliction stops us in our tracks and shows us that life goes on even when we stop our busyness. If we are too busy to hear, God may, in His mercy, stop us with affliction so that we will take the time to get His direction. Which would you prefer, a week of the flu, or a fatal head-on?

Remember: Next time you are afflicted, first ask what God wants to work in your life through the affliction. Recognize it is good for you. Then, after you have heard God’s answer, pray for healing.

**October 30 Evening**

2 Timothy 1:6-8 *6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God…*

We have an insight into a special experience between Paul, Timothy and the Holy Spirit. At some time, Paul had laid hands on Timothy. It may have been when he was ordaining him to be an elder. At that particular moment, God gave Timothy a gift. Paul does not say what it was. I would guess it was to teach, preach, and evangelize. Just because the gift was given, does not mean it automatically comes forth. Just as you fan coals into a flame of fire, Paul encouraged Timothy to work at stirring up his gift.

It sounds like Timothy was a shy person. It is not natural for a shy person to testify to others, or to preach to a crowd. There is a natural fear of doing so. Paul says that God has not given us the spirit of timidity, or fear. Instead, we have been given a spirit of power! Fear implies weakness. In Christ Jesus, we are strong! We have the power to stand up to those who would oppose the gospel. We also have the spirit of love. If we love them, we cannot keep silent. We must share the only hope they have of eternal life. And we have the gift of self-discipline. We can discipline ourselves to say “no” to our old nature and “yes” to the Spirit.

What is the worst the listener can do? They could have you thrown in jail or cause you to suffer for Christ. What an honor! Then Timothy would have joined with Paul in suffering for the gospel. Only the power of God can enable us to suffer for Christ, but He has given us that power.

Do you lean toward timidity? I do. Yet, I know that when the Spirit prompts me, if I will just open my mouth and speak what He gives, that He will see me through whatever follows. God loves to work through those who are timid, so that people can see Jesus and not man.

Consider: God wants you to fan your gift into a flame!

**October 31 Morning**

Psalms 127:1-2 *1 Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. 2 In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat-- for he grants sleep to those he loves.*

One of the most repeated messages in the Bible is our helplessness without God. I can build a dwelling. I can create a family. But if God is not in it, all my work is without meaning. It is utterly unproductive. Man has the idea that if he relies on himself, he will surely get things done. The Gospel message tells us that without the LORD we will accomplish nothing (John 15:5).

We can’t even protect ourselves. Unless God is watching over us, we are clear targets for the enemy of our soul. Consider the infant in the manger. If God was not watching over that helpless baby, what chance would he have had of surviving Herod’s extermination of every infant in the area? The Destroyer is held at bay by God. We forget to thank God for that daily protection.

The psalmist speaks of a house and a city. The New Testament gives both of these as an analogy to the church. Today, we have many men building churches. There are formulas that work to gather large numbers of people. Still, if God is not the builder, if the work is the work of man and not the Holy Spirit, we will see it end in vanity. Is the LORD building the church you attend? Is the leadership following the Holy Spirit? Encourage that by letting your household be built by God. Let God build your home by faithfully hearing from God and following through on His leading.

You can work 18 hours every day. You can put intense effort into something as if all success depended on you, but success comes from the LORD. He doesn’t drive His sheep. He calls to them to follow Him. He promises them rest.

Consider: Are you cognoscente of the fact that success in God’s eyes is not dependent on how hard you labor, but on your obedience in the little things? As you obey in the little things, He works out the big issues, and the fruit of that cooperation is eternal.

**October 31 Evening**

2 Timothy 2:2 *2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*

This is the principle of teaching others to teach others. As you have read through this devotional, you have had times in which the Spirit of God taught you something of great value from the Word. It became a part of your growth in Christ. You are a steward of truths you have been shown. God has entrusted you with that truth. The truth sets us free. In some way it made you a freer person.

One thing is required of stewards, faithfulness. We are to be faithful to continue to apply that truth to our lives, but also to share it with reliable men who are qualified to teach others. Freely you have received, freely give.

As you invest that truth into another person’s life, they in turn are required to invest it in others. It is the principle we see in fruit. All fruit has seeds within it to reproduce more fruit. Have you taken the fruit but kept the seed? Then the spreading of that truth will stop with you. God uses the pyramid scheme in a holy way. The more you share and teach others to share, the greater the effect on the world, and your treasure in heaven multiplies.

In this age, we have wonderful opportunities to live this passage via the media, printed material, and the internet. We can share with many times the number we could ever reach face to face. That also means we must be very careful as to what we share. Error can also be multiplied in the same manner. Trust the Word of God and the Spirit of God to guide you into all truth. Pray for direction as to what to share and how to share it, and may God bless you as you live this passage.

Consider: What has the Spirit taught me that I need to pass on to others?

**November 1 Morning**

Psalms 130:3-6 *3 If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? 4 But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared. 5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. 6 My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning*.

The LORD does keep a record of sins. Every idle word we speak, we will give an account of in the Day of Judgment (Matthew 12:36). BUT -- That word must be the most valuable conjunction to man. *“But with You there is forgiveness!”* Since we know it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to wash away sins (Hebrews 10:4), the psalmist’s words can only be looking forward to the justice of God born by the Son of God. The ransom of our soul is precious indeed. It removes all our sins as far as the east from the west.

If there is forgiveness with God, one would imagine that fear would then have no place. The psalmist says there is forgiveness, therefore God is feared. In 1 Kings 8:37-40 we may find the source of the thoughts of the psalmist. When we are rebellious toward God, He brings difficulty into our lives. Then we turn to Him who knows our every deed, and seek His forgiveness. He then heals our heart and our conditions. The fear comes from knowing that He will justly deal with us when we rebel. Look at it another way. A parent will deal with their child more severely when the child is acting in a way that is dangerous. A parent who doesn’t forgive, doesn’t care, will not bother with discipline. The fact that He cares enough to provide forgiveness, should show us that He is to be feared when we are rebellious.

Waiting on the LORD is a lost discipline. We are such a busy society, we have forgotten what it means to wait for something. The psalmist trusted that the word of God is true, and so he could wait for God to respond in God’s time. That does not mean he is not eager to see the answer. On the contrary, he is watching with expectation, like the watchman that waits for the sunrise when his shift ends, and he can finally close his eyes and rest. Waiting is inseparable from hoping in God’s Word.

Consider: Wait expectantly for God to respond to your prayers, to meet you in your need. Watch like that watchman looking for sunrise.

**November 1 Evening**

2 Timothy 2:3-6 *3 Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs--he wants to please his commanding officer. 5 Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. 6 The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.*

Paul gave us three vocational analogies to the Christian life. First, he suggests we are like soldiers. Soldiers endure hardship. They are not at home but out in the field for a cause. Their time of hardship is temporary but necessary to secure freedom. As a soldier, they do not get involved in civilian affairs. They want to please the commanding officer. Civilian affairs would be a distraction. It is not the reason they are there.

What a great analogy for our walk with the Lord in this life. Some Christians complain, “I didn’t know it would be so hard!” Then why did you join the battle? You could have just stayed a slave, but do realize how hard that is? The good thing is ours is a short tour of duty. We are going home soon. Don’t get wrapped up in this world and its affairs.

The athlete is our next analogy. He trains hard and goes without many of the simple luxuries of life, because he wants to win. Then, as he competes, he must do so according to the rules if he is to win. As Christians, we, too, go without some things that the world may consider essential. We are after a heavenly prize. We want to hear our Lord say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” That’s why we discipline our soul and operate according to the guidelines of the Spirit. We don’t want to be disqualified for the prize.

Last is the farmer. He works hard to raise a crop. He’s up at dawn and quits at dark. Day after day he tends the soil, the crop, picks the weeds, and ensures the crop gets water. There is never an end of things to be done, but he is first to be rewarded with a share of the crop.

Consider: Reward is coming fellow laborer. Keep up the hard work. We will go home. There is a prize. You can almost taste the fruit of your labor.

**November 2 Morning**

Psalms 133:1-3 *1 How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! 2 It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. 3 It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore*.

That is the whole psalm. It is one of the most beautiful expressions of the blessing of unity in Scripture. Most of us have witnessed very little of this type of unity. We are such demanding individuals in the flesh, that while in our flesh, this type of unity is impossible. The only way to arrive at this wonderful blessing is to do as the Apostle Paul said, *“Esteem others better than yourself”*(Philippians 2:2). Only when a group of people come to real humility in Christ can they find this blessing. In most assemblies, we find more division and disunity than anything else!

I have witnessed unity in a couple of different settings. One was in a cult. All members gave up their individual beliefs and preferences to follow the leader and submit to his teaching. That is not the unity written about here. This unity in the psalm has the blessing of God, life forevermore. The other setting was amongst a group of pastors who focused on Jesus and His salvation, the need to win the lost, and to touch their town with His love. They differed on interpretation of Scripture, on style, and even on how best to get to the goal, but they were united in purpose. They humbled themselves to listen to one another in hopes of the LORD leading them to the victory they so longed for. They realized that if one of them was successful that they were all going to be blessed.

Verse two compares unity to the anointing of Aaron for the priesthood. The anointing oil, a picture of the Holy Spirit, ran down over his beard and dripped on his priestly robes. When we humble ourselves and experience unity, we will see an overflowing of the Holy Spirit, not just a drop. Then he compares it with dew on Zion. The heights of Mount Hermon would have dew when the rest of the nation was dry and dusty. Unity is attractive because it is so rare. The morning dew must have made the buildings on Zion glisten as if they were all made of silver. Unity makes everyone look anointed, shining, because Jesus is able to shine through.

Remember: Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He might exalt you in due season.

**November 2 Evening**

2 Timothy 2:14-15 *14 Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. 15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*

We can become so technical and precise that we are constantly correcting others, insisting on our preferred wording. It helps to remember that you once did not see things as clearly as you do today, and that tomorrow you will hopefully see things more clearly. That means you express yourself somewhat differently as you grow in the knowledge of the Lord. So cut yourself and others around you some slack. Don’t focus on what you can correct, but what you can learn from others. It is pride that insists on others seeing the details as you do. It may be helpful to share your understanding in humility. You may find the person you are trying to correct will give you greater insight. *Quarreling about words …only ruins those who listen*. It is a warning sign that you are in a prideful spirit. It never helps.

Paul told Timothy to do his best to present himself as an approved workman. His work is handling the Scriptures. They apply to every situation, speak to every audience, and correct every problem, if we know which ones are applicable by the Spirit. Our part is to be familiar with them so that the Spirit can quicken them to us.

Are you doing your best to present yourself to God as one approved? Are you familiarizing yourself with the Scriptures so that they are available to be applied to your life? Sometimes we discern the appropriate verse, but we don’t make the applications and share the Word with those who need it. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind the appropriate passage and to make an application. Then, share it with those who need it. It will be an example to them and give you the guidance that is needed for the moment.

Remember: Let the Word of Christ live in you richly (Colossians 3:16).

**November 3 Morning**

Psalms 139:5-7 *5 You hem me in--behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. 7 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?*

God is in front of you. God is behind you. Don’t try to wiggle out of it, as His hand is upon you. Some will struggle their whole life to get away from His presence that surrounds us, and if they persist, He will give them their desire. We cannot imagine how horrible it would be to escape the presence of our good God. He surrounds us to show us His love and turn us from our destructive ways. His hand is upon us to bless us. Any restraint is out of mercy and grace to keep us from falling off a cliff of sin. God is intimately involved in each of our lives whether we want Him there or not.

Now, consider the billions of people upon the earth. His involvement and love is just as amazing in every single life. I can’t imagine that because I am finite. I am bound to this physical area my body inhabits. What an amazing God!

I love my wife dearly, but I could never be involved with her to the extent that God is involved with me, though that is God’s goal for me as a husband. I love my children, but if I was that involved in their lives they would feel suffocated. That is because my love is so mixed with my own character that is not enough like God’s perfect character. My love often has my selfish motives mixed in, but not so with God. His love is entirely unselfish and for my good.

I can’t escape that love, that presence, no matter where I flee. There is no place on earth to hide, but why would I want to? If I long to know Him better this passage is a reassuring promise. If I want to rebel or reserve a part of my life for my lust, then this verse is a dreadful warning. Do you sense His presence all around you, His hand upon you? What a great deterrent when I would consider the pleasure of sin for a season!

Consider: Wonderful or dreadful, it is up to you, but you can’t change the fact that He envelopes you in His presence. Think about that as you go through your day today.

**November 3 Evening**

2 Timothy 2:24-26 *24 And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.*

Paul was teaching Timothy to walk in his calling as an elder. Paul had learned from many debates with legalistic Jews that quarrels aren’t fruitful. As someone has said, “A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.” If the discussion becomes heated, someone is unwilling to listen, and both parties are wasting their time.

Instead of being argumentative, God’s servants should be kind to everyone, able to teach, and not resentful. Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit. When we are unkind, it is a clue that we are in the flesh. The elders should be able to teach. He may not have teaching as his main gift, but he should know the Word well enough to teach it. When the church passes up this qualification, we set ourselves up for problems. Freedom from resentment means the person is ready to forgive, knowing that God has freely forgiven them.

We will always face opposition. Paul told Timothy that the proper response was gentle instruction. Gentleness turns away wrath. Our hope is that our opposition will be saved. There are so many testimonies of love winning over those who persecute believers. The only way we can possibly do that is to realize that these people have fallen into the trap of the devil. They are captured slaves doing Satan’s will. In this war over the souls of men, everything we do and say should be with the hope of setting the captives free. Our natural response will push them further into the trap, but a spiritual response would be to extend a loving hand to draw them to freedom. Only the life of the Spirit in us can cause us to react in the way Paul has described.

Remember: Quarreling is unproductive, but love never fails.

**November 4 Morning**

Psalms 139:16b-18 16b*All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. 17 How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! 18 Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.*

In this psalm, we discover the fact that God knows us from the womb. He designed our bodies and planned our lives. Every detail of each day of our life is determined before we are born. That plan is filled with precious thoughts. In this translation we have the translation “to me”, but an equally valid translation is “toward me”. *“How precious toward me are your thoughts, O God!”* The thoughts that God thinks about you are precious. He plans the way for you to best be able to come to know His mercy and love. Though we have free choices to make, God can see them from His perspective of eternity. He works within the choices we will make to bring us to Himself.

How much does God think about you? If you could add those thoughts up they would outnumber the grains of sand. That reveals to us the immense love that He has for each of us individually. Since we know He has numbered every hair on our head, knows every move we make, the thoughts we think, and the choices we will make, He can plan the details of our lives for our good, to reveal Himself to us. Do you consider the thoughts He has toward you precious? You must first realize that He has your eternal good in mind, not your temporary happiness. Once you grasp that, things begin to fit together. We will never understand it all in this life, but we can trust that He has been lovingly bringing us down the road that is best for us. It does require us to respond to that guiding hand of love. If we refuse to acknowledge it, we will be held accountable.

Remember: *“When I awake”* from each night, and from this life, I will still be with Him. I can sleep in peace because I know my tomorrow is planned by Him. I can be free from the fear of death because I know that I will awake from this time upon earth and still be with Him.

**November 4 Evening**

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

The Jewish religion divides up what we refer to as the Old Testament into levels of inspiration. The books of Moses are the most revered. They are said to come from the mouth of God. Paul knew this as well as anyone. He is flying in the face of their tradition when he declares that it is all God-breathed. Peter declared that Paul’s letters are a part of Scripture (2Peter 3:15-16). Certainly the Gospels are also God-breathed. Our entire Bible is the breath of the Spirit through godly men. We have the words of communication that God chose to speak to mankind. All of it is useful! We sometimes ignore some of the more mysterious or historical references, but it is all useful. Paul tells us that it is to be used for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

We have so many other teaching materials. We need to use the Word of God to teach. Most churches readily accept teaching, but are offended if anyone is rebuked or corrected. “How dare you think you are so spiritual that you can say what applies to me!” Very few elders will love enough to rebuke and correct. It is an act of love because it risks rejection and ridicule for the spiritual growth and equipping of the flock. Most modern church attendees will leave and go to another fellowship rather than to face the correction of elders. The response is often to find fault in the elders rather than to receive correction. When the Word rebukes and corrects, there is always the hope of restoration. However, if it is personal or politically motivated, it is always out of desire to dominate.

All the uses of the Word lead to one purpose, equipping the man of God for every good work. Whatever our calling, we need to be equipped for it by the Word of God. The God-breathed Scriptures will show us how, correct our errors, rebuke our failings, and correct and train us in righteousness.

Consider: We go to the Word for comfort and encouragement, even training, but let it also rebuke and correct us. Let it equip us for every good work.

**November 5 Morning**

Psalms 141:3-5 *3 Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips. 4 Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies. 5 Let a righteous man strike me--it is a kindness; let him rebuke me--it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it. Yet my prayer is ever against the deeds of evildoers,*

This could be our daily prayer. Our mouth seems to be the most likely member to join in with the sin of others. It is most likely to express any evil in our own heart. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. When we hear someone slandering a person who has caused us harm, or whose ideas and goals are different from ours, we have a tendency to jump right in and join in the slander. James teaches that if we can control our tongue, we can control our whole body. We need the Holy Spirit to be the guard over our mouths, to keep the door of our lips sealed, unless we can speak words that build up and encourage. (Ephesians 4:29) Our world is full of slander and complaints. Let us be a voice of encouragement and praise.

David prayed his heart would not be drawn toward evil. After his fall with Bathsheba, he no longer trusted his own heart. Do you realize how easily your heart can be drawn after evil? It is always there to entice us with a lie. It offers us a delicacy, but that delicacy will take us further than we wanted to go and cost us more than we wanted to pay. This is similar to the Lord’s Prayer when He prayed, *“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.”*

We need the blows of a friend to wake us up when our mouth or desires are out of control. True friends love you enough to warn and correct you. Fair weather friends will never confront you. A true friend will risk the friendship to tell you the truth. Receive it like anointing oil. Don’t be offended!

In the last line David does not pray against people, but against their evil deeds. Those deeds cause pain and suffering in others’ lives. Our battle is not against people who have fallen for the delicacies offered by Satan, or we may find ourselves praying against ourselves. It is against the actions that lead to destruction.

Prayer: Lord, guard our mouths; keep our hearts from evil, and help us to accept a righteous rebuke.

**November 5 Evening**

2 Timothy 4:1-3 *1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: 2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. 3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.*

Paul knew the anointing and calling upon Timothy’s life. He also knew Timothy could be timid and hesitant to share. That may be why he gave him this charge while declaring that it was before God the Judge and the soon to appear Christ and His kingdom.

He entrusted Timothy with the duty of preaching the Word of God, not only when it was in his schedule, but whenever there was opportunity. He said it was his responsibility to use the Word in all the ways it was meant to be used, for correcting, rebuking, and encouraging. As a timid person, Timothy would probably enjoy encouraging others, so Paul put correcting and rebuking before encouragement in his list. When we know there is a weakness or something we avoid because of our personality, we need to make the effort to put it first.

He also told him to use the gift of preaching with great patience and careful instruction. Preachers can become very impatient while watching their flock’s slow progress. Careful instruction will help them progress more rapidly, but it is still a job in which patience must be exercised.

He warned that the a time was coming when people would pick and choose those they listened to by the criteria of whether or not the preaching was what they desire to hear. We are in that day. Sheep will run from the shepherd that corrects and rebukes to find those that won’t challenge them to forsake their sin. They have pet doctrines that they emphasize above the command of Jesus to love one another. They can find them on the radio, TV, and in the pulpit. Notice it says “a great number,”

Prayer: Lord help us desire the truth of the Word, especially when it is convicting or correcting us.

**November 6 Morning**

Proverbs 3:5-7 *5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.*

One of our greatest temptations is to trust our self. We say, “If you want it done right, do it yourself.” We look to our own experiences, our own insights, our own intellect, when it is not even comparable with the infinite wisdom of God. Is it because we don’t think God will answer us? Or perhaps we think He will not answer in a way that will please us. Why can’t we trust Him to answer us in a way that is ultimately best for us? That is to place trust in His nature, in His heart. If I refuse to do that, I must ask myself why. Either I do not believe He is who the Word declares Him to be, or I prefer to make my own decisions and be my own lord. If I love Him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, I should trust Him with all my heart as well.

The LORD intricately plans all your ways. Do you see His hand? Can you see the abounding mercy? We should acknowledge His grace in our lives, and let Him reveal to us what He is doing. When we look to His direction, the crooked paths become straight. Life becomes a wonderful interaction with our Maker. He touches the world through us, and in the process, transforms our lives by increasing our trust in Him.

To be wise in our own eyes is to deceive our self. It is a refusal to acknowledge our frequent mistakes and our real condition. We desperately need the LORD for guidance and discernment. If we think we can do it on our own, we have no fear of a just God, who, like a father, will discipline us.

Consider: Shun evil by following His directions. Let each day be filled with the wonder of His presence guiding you, so that His ways become your ways.

**November 6 Evening**

2 Timothy 4:6-8 *6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

This letter was the last that Paul wrote. He knew his time had come. He compared his final days to being poured out like a drink offering. Under the Old Covenant, one of the offerings to God was wine poured out upon the altar. (Genesis 35:14; Exodus 29:40) It was usually offered with the body of an animal. Paul was ready to lay his life one final time upon the altar of God. He was beheaded shortly after writing this letter in Rome.

He could declare three things about his ministry. He fought a good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. Life is going to be a fight no matter which course you choose. Paul had chosen the good fight. He chose to fight for the kingdom of God. He chose to fight for what is worthwhile.

He finished the race. He didn’t go part way and give up because of difficulty, and Paul faced some of the greatest difficulties man can face. He endured. We can’t say that until we are at the end as Paul was. By faith we can say that we will finish the race.

He kept the faith. What is the difference between finishing the race and keeping the faith? Some may have their lives cut short because they are losing their faith. Though they finish the race, their faith was faltering. Paul kept the faith alive in his heart even when he did not understand his circumstances. He walked by faith and not by sight to the end. He knew that a crown of righteousness awaited him and all who long for Jesus’ appearing. He knew the reward was worth enduring the battle.

Remember: Fight the good fight and cling to your faith. The reward is well worth it. Endure to the end. Finish the course He has laid out for you.

**November 7 Morning**

Proverbs 4:23 *23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*

You can guard your wealth, your family, your friends, and many things, but if you do not guard your heart, you are in danger of losing everything valuable to you. The desires that you allow your heart to be set upon will direct the course of your life. If it is set upon the temporal, you will lose all that is eternal in the pursuit of the temporal. The things will end up enslaving you. Proverbs 5:22 *The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast.*

Lust for the physical will always demand more. The first satisfaction soon wears off, and a greater indulgence is then required to get that initial feeling. Eventually the world can see your enslavement, though you think you have hidden it from others. It is a meaningless existence.

But for those who have set their heart upon the eternal, life is always increasing in significance. Instead of being mastered, they are mastering their heart and going after the things that will end in blessing and peace. There is no need to hide what is in their heart. They share it freely with all, and others are blessed by it. Though they may not have the abundance of some, they thoroughly enjoy what they do have and share that enjoyment with genuine friends. Their life increases in richness and value as they grow spiritually. They look forward, with longing, to eternity with the God on whom they have set their hearts.

Here are two totally different ways of life decided by one thing, where the heart is set. Where is your heart set? Guard it with all diligence. The temptation to turn toward the temporal is ever present.

Meditation: Keep your eye on the goal and fix your heart there.

**November 7 Evening**

Titus 1:5-7 *5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.6 An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. 7 Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless--not overbearing, not quicktempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.*

This is the beginning of a list of the qualifications of an elder. Another list can be found in 1Timothy 3. The first century church did not have a single man lead the local congregation, rather a greoup of elders jointly led. Notice that in the above passage elders is plural, but town is singular. The Christians in each city, even though they may have met in several different homes, were considered the church of that city. Paul, Timothy, Titus, or one of the other church planters appointed the men who met the qualifications and were called of God as elders.

We have an example of how they functioned in the first verses of Acts 13. Instead of having board meetings, they met together in prayer and fasting. As they worshipped, they sought God’s heart. Though some individuals may have led out, the head of the meeting was the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit. They were following the pattern of the synagogue worship that they previously experienced. Those who had an understanding of God’s Word were given opportunity to speak. It wasn’t always assigned to one man. The word elder, overseer, and shepherd/pastor were interchangeable in the first century. (Acts 20) Together they oversaw the flock of God under the Great Shepherd. They may not have all had the gift of preaching and teaching, but they were all pastors who were ready to share God’s Word.

This is why the qualifications of an elder are important enough for us to have twice in Scripture. Though the interpretation varies among groups, we can see that the standard of an elder is very high for a reason. They should not be elected in a popularity contest but appointed because of their reputation as men that live and teach God’s Word while looking out for God’s sheep.

Consider: These are qualities that every Christian man and woman should allow the Holy Spirit to express in their lives.

**November 8 Morning**

Proverbs 8:34-36 *34 Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. 35 For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the LORD. 36 But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death."*

Jesus is wisdom. To find Him is to find life. To hate Him is to love death. The one who listens to Him is blessed. What could be wiser than to listen to your Creator? He is the One who knows your every need and every choice you should make for your eternal good.

This is a passage that points directly to communion with Christ. Every day we have a choice. We can run into our day as if we knew what we are doing, or we can seek wisdom. To seek wisdom is to wait upon the LORD, to watch at His door, waiting there. It takes time to still our soul, and He does not come out to speak with us until we do.

You could think of the cover of your Bible as the doorway. Open up the door and let wisdom speak to you. The Word of God made flesh longs to speak wisdom into your spirit. Will you watch and wait until He appears? How much does it mean to you to receive His instruction? It may be only a few words, but those words will shape your day and direct your steps. Those words bring the favor of the LORD, for you have met with Life Himself.

The alternative is to avoid life, avoid wisdom, and walk without the favor of

God upon us. None of us would intentionally choose that, but we do make that choice when we refuse to wait upon God. It is more than worth the time to wait until you are still enough to hear His voice. Don’t be satisfied with just leaving a message for Him. Refuse to leave without a meeting in which you hear His words of life.

Consider: Wait on the LORD today. Watch at His door daily.

**November 8 Evening**

Hebrews 1:1-3 *1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

Hebrews is an incredible letter, but we don’t know who the author was. It tells us of Jesus’ superiority over angels, prophets, and Moses. It declares that His sacrifice was the fulfillment of the all sacrifices and that He is now our Great High Priest. It gives us a number of important warnings. It encourages us in the importance of faith.

Hebrews begins by telling us that God no longer speaks to us as He once did. In the past, He used prophets that prophesied in many different manners. Some told parables, some acted out their prophecies, and some wrote poetry. The author of Hebrews declared that now God is speaking to us in Jesus. His life and words are the final and full message of God to man. If you need to hear from God, look to the life and words of Jesus. The Holy Spirit’s ministry is to remind us what He has said. (John 14:26)

Jesus is the heir of everything. He is the instrument of creation. He is the outshining of God’s glory. He is the exact representation of God’s being. Everything is sustained by his powerful word. What an incredible and glorious description of the Son!

This powerful declaration goes on to say that Jesus provided purification for sins. This letter will explain why His blood was necessary for our purification. Now, He is sitting in the place of power, at the helm of the universe, at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Hebrews declares Jesus to be our wonderful Savior, but it also declares His awesome superiority over all His creation. It encourages us to go to Him to access God, but to do so with reverent respect.

Consider: Are you looking to the life and words of Jesus to hear from God?

**November 9 Morning**

Proverbs 9:8-10 *8 Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you. 9 Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning. 10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding*.

It takes a humble heart to receive correction. You can almost gauge your spiritual growth by how well you take rebuke. When we are prideful and immature, our first response is to pick out the wrong in the one who has come to instruct us. We may even voice what we think is wrong with them, just to show them that they are not without fault.

As we grow and God deals with our pride, we tend to listen without responding, and we may even thank the one who has taken the effort to correct us. But later, behind their back, we tell others how arrogant they were to pick out our fault when they have so many of their own. We may acknowledge some truth to their statement, but we console ourselves with justifications for our weakness. “After all, who is perfect?” we ask.

When we have failed like this a number of times and the voice of the LORD begins to get through our walls of our pride, we begin to understand that the LORD and His love for us is what makes us of value. Then, when a voice of correction comes, we may still flinch with pain from the blow, but we no longer look at the messenger. We know God allowed the messenger to come for our good. We take the message to the LORD and examine our condition. As we discern how much of the rebuke is true, we ask the LORD to help us express His life in that area, and not self. We take that old nature to the cross and leave it there. Then we can rejoice that the LORD has drawn us closer to Himself. We may even sincerely thank the messenger and ask for their help.

Consider: What a difference in our reaction to rebuke as we mature in spirit! At what stage are you?

**November 9 Evening**

Hebrews 2:9-11 *9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. 10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.*

Jesus humbled Himself to become a man, setting aside His glory, to be one of us. Because He took the punishment of sin in our place, tasting death for everyone, God crowned Him with glory and honor. That should reveal to us the great heart of God who was willing to give His only Son, but also that He honors those who sacrifice for the good of others. Jesus sacrificed His life for the purpose of bringing many sons to glory. He left His glory so that He could bring you to glory.

The author of Hebrews often used nautical terms. There is an unusual one here in this passage. When a ship ran aground, the strongest, most capable swimmer was chosen to take a rope from the ship to the safety of the shore and secure it. The sailors could then cling to the rope and not be swept away by the current as they made their way to the safety of the shore. It is translated “author” here. You could also use the word “trailblazer”. Jesus secured a line of safety for us to reach God.

He is our perfect Savior because He suffered all the things we suffer. He got in the boat with us and endured the storms of life with us. None of us could ever hope to make it to the safety of shore. Knowing that the boat of humanity had run aground and was about to be beaten to pieces, He joined us in our boat and suffered with us. He dove in and braved the currents and secured the rope to within the Holy of Holies in heaven. As we escape this storm we are brought right into the very presence of God, accepted in Christ, who became one of us.

Consider: He is our perfect trailblazer. He can show us the Way because He walked (swam) it for us.

**November 10 Morning**

Proverbs 11:24-25 *24 One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. 25 A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.*

This is very similar to Jesus’ expression about the one who tries to save their life and ends up losing it. The one who loses his life finds it. It is the upside down world of the Kingdom of God. I once met a man who thought the Lord told him that he would one day be rich. I reminded him that he had true wealth already in his knowledge of the Lord and gifts of the Spirit. That is true wealth! He has a family that loves and respects him. What a wealthy man indeed! He freely gave of that spiritual wealth, and if you asked for the little finances he had, he would share that with you as well. The wealthiest man I knew lived completely upon the hand of God. He trusted God would provide his every need as he ministered to dying people in a hospital of a foreign land. God always met his need. These men gave freely and they gained even more.

On the other hand, I know some extremely wealthy people who begrudge giving any amount. They live in the poverty of their own spirit. They have never learned that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). They never experienced the wonder that you cannot out give God. That is a sad thing, for they will give an account to God for hoarding their resources.

God invests in us spiritual and physical wealth so that we can be His hands of mercy and grace in the world. If we stand at the judgment and declare that we buried it because we knew we would have to account for it all, He will say to us what he said to the unfaithful steward. “*Wicked and slothful servant!”* (Matthew 25:26) God help us to realize this Kingdom principle.

Meditation: To give is to be blessed and to increase, but to hoard in fear is to wither and die.

**November 10 Evening**

Hebrews 2:14,17-18 *14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--*

*17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

It is important for us to understand that Jesus was all man. That does not change the fact that He was all God, but in every way He was made like us. He was one of us. He had flesh and blood. He had Mary’s lineage. He was tempted. He had to endure just like we have to endure.

When Adam lost the dominion of earth to the devil in the Garden, God promised the offspring of the woman would one day crush that devil’s head, his authority. That offspring had to be flesh and blood to take back what flesh and blood gave up. He is the Second Adam in that He took back what the first Adam lost. The sin of the first Adam brought death to all. The Second Adam came and provided life to all, by destroying him who held the power of death.

As a man enduring all the temptations and sufferings that we face, He can give the perfect counsel. He faced the same things and yet came through in sinless victory. What better priest could we hope for? All others have failed like us. How can we be sure of the answers they give us? But Jesus became the merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, giving us God’s direction to us and presenting our requests to God. As He intercedes, He can convey our feelings and difficulties in complete harmony with how we mean them because He has been where we are. That is why He is the one person who can help you in any and all circumstances. He is the One who can perfectly understand your heart and present it to God with mercy and faithfulness. He made it possible through the atonement that He provided in His flesh and blood body.

Consider: When you pray, understand that He knows exactly how you feel.

**November 11 Morning**

Proverbs 16:9; 16:25 *9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.*

*25 There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death*.

We often go through life guessing which way is best. A man who wants to please the LORD will ask for His direction and help in decisions. Sometimes the answer comes clearly, and at other times there seems to be no answer at all. Yet, because of our situation, we must make the choice we think is best. Scripture declares that the LORD has already planned our steps. He has ordained each day of our life to teach us and draw us closer. We often fret over our decisions, but what a peace to know that when we choose what we believe to be the LORD’s will, we will either have His instruction that we have made a mistake or we will go on in the steps He has already ordered.

The other side of this coin is the second verse above, which is repeated in the proverbs. To merely go by what looks good or seems right, may end in disaster. Only God can see all the consequences from a decision. We need to take the time to seek God’s direction. Just because it looks good to men, or even may be a success in the eyes of the world, doesn’t mean it is good for you. So what are we to do?

Commit your way to the LORD. Seek to know His will. Get the counsel of godly people. Make your decision with a heart surrendered to God. Then, trust that if you have erred, the LORD will make it clear to you and show you how to correct your error. It is not as if God cannot get through to us. As long as we have a surrendered heart that is listening, He can make His will clear to us.

Consider: If you are seeking to know God’s will, He can make it known to you. Until He does, keep going in the direction He has led you.

**November 11 Evening**

Hebrews 4:11-13 *11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

The author of Hebrews compared our spiritual journey to that of the Jews making their way to the Promised Land. He reminded the Hebrews that they were promised a place of rest, but many never made it. We, too, are promised a place of rest from our efforts to be made right with God. If we place our trust in Jesus’ work in our place, we no longer strive to please God by keeping rules.

It is a strange paradox that we make every effort to enter that rest. What is the effort against? The author points to two things, unbelief (3:19) and disobedience to the voice of God (4:6). Our sinful nature leans toward unbelief and disobedience, and we must make every effort to keep from sliding in that direction. When we see the historical examples and examples in lives around us of the devastation of unbelief and disobedience, we should let it remind us that going in that direction is utterly destructive. Make every effort to stand firm in your faith and obey the voice of God today.

Next, the writer tells us that the Word of God is a living and active thing. It is not just words from long ago. We share it with others, but as we do, it speaks to us. Those stories we read are God’s voice to us today. It examines the thoughts and attitudes of our heart. Make every effort to hear and receive what is being said, mixing it with faith that results in action.

The language of the last verse implies that we must look straight into the eyes of God as He examines the very depths of our soul. He sees it all. There is no fooling Him. All the more reason to listen to and obey what the Word of God is speaking to your heart today.

Consider: Are you listening to the living Word today?

**November 12 Morning**

Proverbs 12:16 *16 A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.*

17:9-10 *9 He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends. 10 A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool*.

Julio Ruibal was one of the instrumental men in the revival of Cali, Columbia. He was a man of prayer and fasting. After coming to Cali to minister, he joined the association of pastors and met with them regularly. At one meeting, someone said something that offended him. He decided to quit going. After separating himself for some time, the Lord spoke to his heart and told him to refuse to be offended. He returned to the group with his apologies, a humbler man.

When we let the words that others speak to us repeat in our minds again and again we build up a hatred for that person. Bitterness poisons our heart. It affects our efforts to serve God and even to be at peace with others. The more we allow those words to hurt us, the more we seem to play them over in our minds. But what right do we have to be offended? If Jesus was not offended by those who crucified Him, who are we to hang onto offenses?

We actually put ourselves in a place of torment. The one who offended us is probably not losing any sleep over the matter. In many cases, he or she did not even know that those words cut so deeply. Who, then, is fanning the flames of those words into a fire that is consuming you?

The proverbs for today show us that we are prudent to overlook insults. To cover over an offense promotes love. Didn’t our Lord command us to love one another? A rebuke gives us a chance to make sure that we are in sync with the Holy Spirit.

Consider: The rebuke of a friend is often a sincere expression of love, whereas flattery may be meant to destroy us.

**November 12 Evening**

Hebrews 4:14-16 *14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-yet was without sin. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Why should we endure in this faith that we profess? It’s because Jesus has gone through the heavens and into the very presence of God to intercede for us. Having gained such a great victory for us, all we must do is endure. What a tragedy if we fall away after He has done and is doing for us! Cling to your faith.

After all, this faith that we have is like no other. This faith declares a God that feels our suffering with us. Having endured every temptation we face, He can speak to our hearts the solution that He proved works. He can show us the way out of each and every temptation we face because He found the way Himself. After blazing that sinless trail for us, He gave us His righteousness while taking our sin to the death of the cross.

It is with His righteousness that we can confidently approach the very throne of

God. It is a throne of grace to us who have received His mercy through the blood of Christ. There, before the throne, we not only receive grace, that which we do not deserve, but also mercy, that which we do not deserve instead of justice.

Asking for the gifts we need to endure and to be what we are called to be is to ask for grace. Asking for repeated cleansing for our shortcomings and for gifts in spite of the fact that we did not use them properly when last given is asking for mercy. We can confidently ask for both because of our Great High Priest. There is no need to wallow in condemnation.

Consider: Go to the throne of grace and ask not only to be changed, but for every gift you need.

**November 13 Morning**

Proverbs 13:3 *3 He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin*.

17:27-28 *27 A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered. 28 Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.*

Today there seems to be an effort to speak the most words and dominate any conversation. I have often listened to conversations in which two people speak at the same time, as if they were vying for airtime. Does our society consider the silent one to be the wise one? It seems the one who gets his point across the clearest and most convincingly is considered the winner. But does it matter how it seems? Ultimately, for you to come to a correct conclusion, an understanding of God’s view is really the important thing.

Do you find yourself falling into our cultural norm of saying too much and then wishing you’d shown more restraint? The proverbs we are considering today teach that guarding our lips is guarding our very life. It is the man of knowledge who shows restraint. One appropriate word can demolish an edifice built by a thousand rash words. Restraint gives you time to consider the validity of what is said and to search out any faults in an argument.

One of my most valuable college classes was a class in rhetoric. Language has a number of patterns that are designed to build a case. Many of them have flaws that are easily pointed out. The Holy Spirit can show them to you if you are listening. If you are trying to speak just to make your point, you will miss that quiet voice of the Spirit. There is nothing wrong with saying nothing and speaking another day after considering the matter. You don’t have to win every discussion.

Consider: We have two ears and one mouth. Does that tell us something about the ratio in which they should be used?

**November 13 Evening**

Hebrews 7:25-27 *25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. 26 Such a high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. 27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.*

The author of Hebrews was comparing the old order with the new. In the old, the priests had to come every day, morning and evening, to offer a sacrifice. At special times of the year there were additional sacrifices. On the Day of Atonement, one priest would take the blood of the lamb into the Holy of Holies and sprinkle it before the Ark of the Covenant.

All of that was a picture of the heavenly reality. Unlike the copy on earth, the heavenly priest, Jesus Christ, never dies. He serves forever. The blood He sprinkled before God was not that of animals, but His own. It is not as if He needs to present a sacrifice for Himself, for He is sinless. He doesn’t have to do it over and over again, for His sacrifice was sufficient for all and for all time.

If anyone came to the high priest and offered a sacrifice, he would soon have to come again with another because of his weakness. But Jesus great sacrifice covered all sin for all time. When we come to Him and accept His sacrifice in our place, we do not need to come again and again. He saves completely all who come to God through Him. He lives to forever present the proof of our redemption.

Are you living in the conviction that all your sins have been dealt with? You should confess any that appear in your life today, but you should also know that they are dealt with already. There is no need for another sacrifice. There is no need to sprinkle more blood. Your holy, blameless, and pure Priest, who is exalted above the heavens, took care of it already. Confess and repent, yes, but offer a sacrifice of praise for His finished work.

Meditation: ALL my sin has been paid for in full. What should be my response?

**November 14 Morning**

Proverbs 18:19 *19 An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel.*

19:11 *11 A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.*

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Jesus warned us that it would be impossible for offenses not to come. We can offend others with even a compliment. But when those offenses come our way, or we accidentally offend another, we have a difficult task before us. Jesus told us to love one another. Offense is one of the chief snares in keeping us from obeying that command. If we have offended someone, we will find they are more unyielding than a fortified city. They think you intentionally harmed them. To keep from being harmed again, they set up walls of distance, walls of distrust. Winning a fortified city was a long drawn out effort. That is what it takes to win someone we’ve offended. It is much easier to carefully guard our words than to win over someone who has been offended. Be prepared for the long haul and don’t give up.

On the other hand, if you are the offended party, let wisdom give you patience. Often offense comes from misunderstanding. Clarify and understand the offender’s words and motives. Give them time to see things differently. If it is pure animosity, be gracious enough to overlook it. You are more likely to win that person by refusing to be offended. Wisdom teaches us that to accept offense is to only harm our self. To receive an offense will only make the offender have a sense of justification. To overlook it, protects your heart from bitterness and from more damage from the words. That is easier said than done, but it helps to consider that it is the wise thing to do. It is to your glory. It is the example Jesus set for us.

Consider: Refuse to be offended. Endeavor not to offend.

**November 14 Evening**

Hebrews 10:12-14 *12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. 13 Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, 14 because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*

This passage is reminding us that Jesus’ work of redemption is finished. He is now seated at the right hand of God, the place of power and authority. What He did cannot be undone. Meanwhile, God is putting everything under Christ’s feet. That is an often-repeated theme of Scripture.

Part of the process of putting all things under His feet is described in verse 14. Many Christians do not understand why they continue to sin. If Jesus made us perfect, if we are a new creation in Christ, if our heart has been made new, then why am I still struggling with the flesh? Why do I have to crucify it daily?

All those things are true of you. You have been made perfect before God. A transaction has been made. You gave your sins, past, present and future, (*for all time*) to Jesus upon the cross. You received His righteousness like a credit to your account. It is not yet what you express in your daily life, but it is what the Father counts as yours.

The last line of our passage sounds like a contradiction if we do not understand this idea, *“made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”* Remember that God sees all time presently. The work is done and yet it is in progress. You are being made holy in your daily expression, yet you are perfect before God from His eternal view. Our daily struggle with sin, our daily crucifixion of our old nature, is putting the enemies under the feet of Jesus. We are being made holy, and will only be finished when we see Him. (1John 3:2) It is the process of sanctification, and it will be completed. Don’t despair of the struggle. Battle on! It is God putting all enemies under the feet of your Savior. The last enemy will be death itself (1Corinthians 15:26). Don’t be discouraged. It is a work of God.

Meditation: How can I cooperate today with God’s work of making me holy?

**November 15 Morning**

Proverbs 21:3, 27 *3 To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.*

*27 The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable-- how much more so when brought with evil intent!*

God doesn’t need your offering in the plate, but you need to give it! Sometimes we get the idea that if we give to God or make some kind of sacrifice, God is indebted to us. Maybe then He will overlook our sins that we refuse to forsake. The justification in our minds goes something like this: “I don’t want to give up this thing that I know is wrong, so instead, I will give money to the needy.” Good deeds don’t nullify evil ones. They don’t earn you points in heaven. We are expected to do good when the opportunity arises. That is simply the right thing to do. Not to do so is evil.

God owns everything, even the things in your temporary possession. When you sacrifice of your time or money, you are merely giving what is God’s into the hands of another. That is liberating for you. It helps you stay free from enslavement to the love of money. God gave it to you to meet your needs, but also so you could give to those in need. It is more blessed to give than receive. God is the greatest giver. When we give we are like Him, if we give from pure motives.

Some would give expecting influence or favor in return. That is to sacrifice with evil intent. Giving should have no strings attached. It is simply a transfer in stewardship to those with a greater need.

God is not after your possessions. He is after your heart. He wants you to be increasingly conformed to His likeness. That includes giving from a pure heart of compassion for the needs of others, or giving when God directs. Samuel told Saul that to obey was better than sacrifice, and to listen to God than sacrificial ram’s blood. If God has your heart, then your sacrifices come from pure motives.

Consider: Am I unconsciously putting strings on my gifts?

**November 15 Evening**

Hebrews 10:19-22 *19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water*.

We can confidently enter the Holy of Holies in heaven, going before the presence of God Almighty, because of the blood of Jesus. His blood was the payment for all our sins. It covers every sin we commit in our entire life. We don’t have to worry that we will face judgment for something we did or left undone. We come by Jesus’ merit not our own.

The shadow of the heavenly temple on earth had a curtain that one priest entered only once a year. What anticipation there was when the time came! When Jesus gave up His life on the cross, that curtain was torn from top to bottom. The author of Hebrews wrote that the real curtain is the body of Jesus. That body was torn that we might stand before God and make our requests.

Since we have such an incredibly great High Priest over the temple of God in heaven, we are encouraged to draw near. This is the theme of Hebrews. Draw near to God. Jesus has made a way. Draw near with a sincere heart. Our guilt is gone, and our lives have been transformed by the water of the Word.

The priest of old had to offer a sacrifice for himself to set aside his guilt. He had to ceremoniously wash his body before he ministered. Our sacrifice, Jesus, has already offered up Himself that our conscious may be clean. He has washed us with His Word. That is the reality of those shadows in the earthly temple. You are ready to go in through His body into the very presence of God. Draw near!

Consider: All this was done that we might go in anytime. Are you entering in to the heavenly Holy of Holies?

**November 16 Morning**

Proverbs 30:4-5 *4 Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know! 5 "Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him*.

Who? The Word of God, the flawless One! He is the One who has ascended into heaven, but He first descended into the earth to be one of us. He gathers the wind in the hollow of His hands. The Spirit goes from Him and you hear His sound but only He knows where He is going. He is the One who has wrapped up the waters in His cloak. It is the washing of the water of the Word that prepares us to be the bride of Christ. He is the One who established the ends of the earth.

What is His name? JHWH! And what is His Son’s name? Jesus, the Christ, the one and only Son of God! Do you know His name? A thousand years before His birth God said, *“This day have I begotten Thee”*. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14).

Have you let Him become your shield? What better shield than the One who made it all. Have you taken refuge in Him? What safer place could be found than the Almighty, who loves you and gave Himself for you? Trust in Him at all times. Pour out your heart before Him, the flawless One.

Meditation: My eternal Savior is the Creator, the Word made flesh, the flawless One!

**November 16 Evening**

Hebrews 10:25, 35-36 *25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

*35 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.*

It is an epidemic in the church today. The worldly attitude of not being bothered has found a place in the hearts of many Christians. Stay at home Christians probably outnumber those that worship together. For many, it began when they were offended by something that happened where they found fellowship. It may have been a pastor that was immoral, an accountant that cheated, or power struggle that got ugly. Instead of realizing that flesh had gained one small victory, they counted the war for encouraging fellowship lost. Instead of striving all the more to make that fellowship strong and safe, they retreat to the comfort and predictability of their home. “I can watch a TV preacher.” It was a problem in the first century also, (minus the TV) because people are prone to sin.

Fellowship isn’t safe! Neither is God! God and the fellowship of believers will challenge you, test you, and change you. We need that to grow and mature. Instead of allowing the trials and tests to grow us, we often retreat to our cave and hole up so that our heart won’t be hurt again. That is the way of stagnation. There is a fellowship of believers that needs you, and you need a fellowship of believers. The trials will strengthen and grow you.

If you aren’t in a fellowship of believers now, ask yourself why. Don’t throw away your confidence in what God can do in you and through your brothers and sisters in Christ. Stick it out! Pray it through. Be a part of the positive, encouraging transformation of your local fellowship. God has promised to bless you for it. The author of these verses warned us that as we approach the Lord’s return, it is all the more necessary to meet together for encouragement. *So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.*

Consider: How can I encourage others where I fellowship?

**November 17 Morning**

Proverbs 30:7-9 *7 "Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: 8 Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. 9 Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God*.

The author of this proverb had a healthy fear of the LORD. Knowing the deceitfulness of his own flesh, he asked for two things. The first was to keep falsehood and lies far from him. The passage does not say whether those lies come from his lips or from another. We can look at it both ways. We can’t keep others from deceiving us, which in turn causes us to make wrong judgments. We can ask God to keep others from lying to us. But just as important is to ask God to help us not be tempted to lie. Most of us don’t outright plan to lie, but in the heat of a conversation there is a way of putting things that brings you favor or respect through a distortion or exaggeration. We can justify it, but it is lying nonetheless.

God protect us from our treacherous self-exaltation.

Then the author asks for daily bread. Jesus echoed this in the Lord’s Prayer. If I have too much, it may cause my heart to turn from the LORD. I need to have needs that drive me to prayer. I need to see my needs met little by little so that I give Him praise and thanks. If I go hungry I may get desperate enough to steal, and that would dishonor the God who I profess to serve. So, I ask for sufficiency, not abundance or poverty.

Reader, do you recognize how deceitful your flesh can be? Do you dream of hitting it rich, thinking of all the good you would do with the money? The worst thing for many of us is to get that for which we have asked. Recognize the power of the flesh, and live to stay free from its power. Live in the power of the Holy Spirit instead.

Prayer: Please give me sufficiency and a healthy fear of the LORD.

**November 17 Evening**

Hebrews 11:1-3 *1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. 2 This is what the ancients were commended for. 3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*

Faith, it is a difficult thing to describe. The Bible’s definition is to be sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This chapter in Hebrews goes on to give us numerous examples of faith demonstrated in the lives of people in Scripture. The introduction to the chapter says that the possession of this sureness and certainty is what made the lives of the saints commendable.

We often think that great deeds done are the reason that God would approve of a life, but this passage says it is the source of the deeds. One could have faith and not have opportunity to express it, such as the thief on the cross next to Jesus. In most cases, faith expresses itself in unusual actions that the world considers crazy or worthless. What has your faith motivated you to do that made no sense to the world? What is it motivating you to do today?

The first illustration of faith is creation. How was the universe formed? Honest science says there is more than the forces we understand at work. Faith simply reads the Word of God and declares that God said it and it was. Science must declare matter to be eternal for it is a “scientific” fact that nothing comes from nothing. Faith says matter came from the Creator. Which takes more “faith”?

If everything you see was formed at God’s command, what does your faith tell you of the hope of sanctification and heaven? Is it any easier for God to speak universes into existence than it is for Him to bring you to heaven perfected in body, soul, and spirit? (1 Thessalonians 5:23) Faith declares, “God said it, and I believe it.’ It is being sure of our hope, and certain of what we can’t see. God can finish the work He started, crowning His creation with purified believers.

Prayer: Lord, increase my faith. Help me have the certainty that You will finish the work You started in me.

**November 18 Morning**

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 9-10 *2 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."*

*9 What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. 10 Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.*

Solomon set his heart to find the meaning of life. He tried pleasure of all kinds. He tried to find satisfaction in wealth, in building projects, and in increasing his great wisdom. In the end, he concluded it was meaningless. A million men had come and gone before him, and nothing had changed. He grieved over the fact that those men are not remembered nor would he be. We don’t know what Solomon looked like. We can’t know him personally. All we have are a few pages of history and some of his sayings of wisdom. Is that all there is to life?

He had the wisdom to see that everything that is promoted as new is just a different face on an old product. Man still tries to find pleasure in the same things he looked to millenniums ago. He’ll still be seeking the same things tomorrow.

What Solomon in all His wisdom did not see was the coming of Jesus. Though the promise was made to his father, and though as the son of David he was a foreshadowing type of Christ, he did not see his descendant would be the Messiah. Could he have said that all is meaningless if he knew God was going to show us how to live and die through the sacrifice that makes us fit for heaven? To seek the things of the world and personal satisfaction is always meaningless. To come into a relationship with your Creator and find His purpose for your existence is filled with eternal significance. Solomon knew we were to fear God and keep His commands, for there would come a day of judgment. What he missed was a deepening daily relationship with that God, which lays up treasures in heaven that do not perish.

Meditation: Meaningful, meaningful, is a life in personal relationship with the living God.

**November 18 Evening**

Hebrews 11:6 *6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

What does it take to please God? Faith! Remember that faith is described as being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we can’t see. Why is faith needed to please God? The passage answers, *“because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”*

First we must believe He exists. Though we have mountains of evidence, it still takes faith to believe the unseen. God wants you to know He is real. That is the beginning of your spiritual journey. Somewhere along the road of life you first began to consider that He was real and involved in your life. Our sinful nature will fight acknowledgment of this reality because it implies submission. If I accept the work of the Spirit in me and acknowledge that God is real, I owe a debt of gratitude to my Maker. Then I begin to realize I may not be living according to my gracious Maker’s design. Just to begin believing that He exists starts a cycle of reconciliation and change in authority over my life.

Then the passage tells us that we need to believe that God rewards those who earnestly seek Him. If we believe He exists but don’t believe He rewards the ones who earnestly seek Him, we have misconstrued the loving relational nature of God. We have made Him out to be a dictator rather than a loving Father. Have you taken both steps, belief in His existence and His loving relational nature? Then you are pleasing God. If you are stuck on that journey, ask Him to show you where your attitude or understanding has gone off track. He wants to show you and to draw you into a relationship with Him.

Meditation: Can I say that I am earnestly seeking God?

**November 19 Morning**

Ecclesiastes 4:9-11 *9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: 10 If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! 11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?*

Jesus sent his disciples out two by two. We need the companionship, fellowship, and encouragement of a partner. That friend will be a part of our greatest joys and deepest pains. We expect more from those with whom we share our hearts. Often, they will be the cause of the deepest pains, but the sharing of life’s joys makes it worth it.

We all need a friend with whom we can share our heart. We should always take our burdens to the Lord first, but it is often helpful to share them with that trusted friend also. They can give you a perspective that sees your situation through different eyes. They can encourage you and share their own similar experiences. Since we are to “do unto others as we would have them do to us,” we should look for a friend to whom we can be all of the above.

For most people, this companion will be their spouse. It takes a lot of work to get to this level of supporting one another in a marriage, but it is worth the effort. If you have settled for less, work through to a deeper relationship. Value your differences. Forgive and be willing to be hurt and forgive again, remembering that your spouse is enduring the same from you. The rewards of a deeper intimacy are more than worth it.

Remember: There is a friend that sticks closer than a brother. Jesus told his disciples that He was going to call them friends. He wants a deeper intimacy with you. Let Him be your ultimate companion.

**November 19 Evening**

Hebrews 12:1-3 *1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

The picture that the author is painting is of a great arena. The faithful who have died in Christ are occupying the grandstands. You and I are still here on the track running our race, staying in our lanes. The Greek runners ran in the nude so as not to be hindered by their clothing, but we seem to have all kinds of things on us. We carry some of the things of our past life, the life before we came to Christ. We need to drop it all and run!

Keep your eyes on our hero and role model, Jesus. Look at the amazing race He ran. If that doesn’t inspire you to drop everything and run, nothing will. He fixed His eyes on the joy of seeing you transformed. With that vision He was able to finish His run on a shameful cross. That was the victory tape. When He burst through He found Himself the winner of all time, seated at the right hand of the throne of God. That is where we need to keep our eyes.

When the race gets tough, when you are tired and tempted to just give up, look at Jesus. What a race He ran! What a victory He won! He started you on this race, and He will help you finish it.

Consider: If Jesus’ life doesn’t inspire you to run all out, what will?

**November 20 Morning**

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 *1 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. 2 Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.*

When we gather together for corporate worship, we need to be especially conscious of what we are saying. Modern worship services often focus on one preacher. How important it is that his words be clear and to the point! If there is humor, it needs to be applicable and appropriate. Better a short sermon that is anointed, than a long winded one with many rabbit trails. We need to leave with the clear message ringing in our hearts. Anything that distracts from that should be avoided. C. S. Spurgeon once said that the ground behind the pulpit was holy ground, and that one should take their shoes off before standing there.

We can be easily moved by emotion and the appeal of the sermon to make a vow to God. This passage warns us not to be hasty in our hearts to utter anything before God. Be sure that it is at the direction of the Holy Spirit and that you have counted the cost before making commitments to God. To make a vow to the Almighty is a serious thing. When God promises something to you, you can count on it coming to pass. We are to be like Him, faithful to our word. Use caution not to fill the air with words just to avoid silence. God often speaks to us in the silence.

When you come together to worship, come to hear the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart. Expect Him to meet you there. Take what He has said seriously. Take it with you through the week and determine how God would have you respond. Count the cost and then make the commitment.

Consider: What steps can I take to remember and cling to the Spirit’s direction?

**November 20 Evening**

Hebrews 12:14-15 *14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.*

One of the great struggles of the flesh and spirit is over relationships. We expect a reciprocal kindness from those with whom we share our life. We often bare our soul to them and that makes us very vulnerable. So when a family or church member turns against us, whether through misunderstanding or difference of opinion, the conflict often becomes very personal and painful.

The author of Hebrews asked the flock to make every effort to live in peace with all men. It is easier to live at peace with a semi-hostile world than it is with those who are close to us. To give us some direction, the writer included holiness along with the effort to be at peace. Then, to put the screws on, he added that without holiness we wouldn’t see the Lord. (*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God*. Matthew 5:8) Then, to give the flesh a final deathblow, he added that we are missing the grace of God if we let bitterness grow. Not only that, but our bitterness will end up defiling many. How can we let willful conflict continue when we see these consequences?

The way out of this downward destructive cycle is to be merciful. You have received mercy you did not deserve; pass it on! Be to others as God is to you. Make every effort! You may not be reconciled, but making every effort means that you will always desire reconciliation even if it means agreeing not to agree. Take the situation to God in prayer. Get inside the other person’s shoes and try to understand them, rather than insisting on being understood. The peacemaker is blessed and will inherit the earth.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to make every effort to be at peace with all men. Keep me from a contentious spirit that insists on my way. Make me an instrument of peace.

**November 21 Morning**

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 *13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.*

Solomon searched out all the avenues of life to find something of meaning. He encouraged man to enjoy his labor and the simple pleasures of life, but to avoid extremes. Everything he looked to for fulfillment, he concluded was meaningless. But here in the last two verses of this book, he gives us his conclusion of all his seeking. *Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man.* A healthy fear of God will deter us from evil.

His commandments are given for our good. If we will let God’s Word direct our lives, we will certainly be better off than if we had ignored it. The Word is a lamp to our feet and a light unto our path. We sometimes get confused about what God would have us do. This sentence helps make the will of God an idea we can grasp. “If I will fear God and keep His commands, I will have done all that I should.” That is our whole duty in one sentence.

*For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.* The temptations of life lose their attraction when we consider standing before God to answer for them. There is nothing hidden from His eyes. God will reward the good and punish the evil. Those in Christ can thank God that their sins are covered with His blood. There is still the judgment of reward for us, but many of our deeds may be determined to be wood, hay, and stubble. Those done by the Holy Spirit through us will be the precious stones that endure (1 Corinthians 3:12-13).

Consider: Is your life in keeping with the duty of man described here? Do you live in the light of the fact that we will all one day give an account to God of everything we have done and said?

**November 21 Evening**

Hebrews 13:3-5, 8 *3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. 4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*

*8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*

The letters in the New Testament sometimes end with a list of one- line instructions. This is the case with Hebrews. I have just pulled a few. They are all worth heeding.

A great number in the body of Christ live under the threat of persecution. We should remember them in our prayers and do what we can to assist them as if we were there among them. The Voice of the Martyrs and several other organizations exist to help the persecuted church. Read their stories, and let your heart be touched to pray and give.

Our world is trying to destroy the foundation of the home, which is marriage with fidelity. God is faithful. That is the one reason we should be faithful. Since marriage is a picture of our relationship with Christ, infidelity is a picture of idolatry. No wonder the godless are bashing the institution of marriage.

Contentment should come from the fact that our greatest need is met in Christ Jesus. He is our Provider. He gives us what we need. His presence in our lives should be the source of our contentment. If we are not content, we have set our heart on something other than Christ.

Finally, though everything in the physical world changes, Jesus Christ will eternally be the same awesome Savior that He is and always has been. He is the rock we must cling to in an ever-changing world.

Consider: When I am discontented, I must discover what my heart has fixed upon outside of Christ.

**November 22 Morning**

Song of Songs 2:14-15 *14 My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. 15 Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.*

The Song of Songs is about a love relationship between Solomon and a young woman. In a type or shadow it is about Jesus (the Son of David) and His bride, the church. The church is a made up of many members, and this speaks to us all. But it also speaks to us individually. The Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 5 that marriage is a mystery that represents Christ and the church. As you read the Song of Songs, place yourself in the role of the beloved. Let the words of the Lover speak to your heart. We consider the love of Christ expressed on the cross, but we should also consider that relational love that made Him willing to go there.

In this passage, He calls you His dove. He wants to see your face. To Him, your face is lovely. He longs to hear your voice, for He considers it to be sweet. Our flesh and blood body will pass away, and we will have new bodies that are a clearer expression of our spirit. (1Corinthians 15:51,52; 1John 3:2) He sees that now in you. He sees past the passing and to the eternal. Take time to come out of hiding in all your busyness, and come and talk with Him face to face.

In this song, the Lover and his beloved both have vineyards. It represents the fruit of their lives. Little foxes come in to spoil the fruit. They are going to see that those things that keep their lives from being fruitful are eliminated. What is it that keeps your life from being fruitful? Are you planning to catch it?

Prayer: Lord, help me to be completely Yours. Help me see and catch those things that keep our relationship from being fruitful.

**November 22 Evening**

Hebrews 13:15-17 *15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. 17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

The great sacrifice that was pleasing to God has already been offered, but we can still bring a sacrifice of praise. It is not a sacrifice for us unless it comes from difficulty. Difficulty is common in the Christian life, but praise should be just as common. The difficulties refine us and prepare us for eternity. We can always praise God in the difficulty because He is our sufficiency. He meets every need, and sees us through every trial. Each one should strengthen us. Sometimes the praise alone is enough to lift our hearts to victory.

Another sacrifice that the writer encourages is doing good to others. It usually costs us something to do good and share. When we do it as unto the Lord, it is a sweet smelling sacrifice to Him. Do you want to do something to put a smile on God’s face? Bring a sacrifice of praise or of doing good and sharing.

Verse 17 is rarely uttered by a humble leader to his own flock, but by a shepherd to another fold such as the case here. Your pastor most likely will not tell you to stop making His work such a pain or to submit to your God appointed authority, but let us hear it from the writer of Hebrews. It is not good for either of you when you are a burden by constant criticism or insistence on your personal preferences. Be a joy not a pain!

Meditation: Your praise, good deeds, and sharing can be a sacrifice to God. Be a joy to your elders, not a pain.

**November 23 Morning**

Song of Songs 8:5-7 *5 Who is this coming up from the desert leaning on her lover? Under the apple tree I roused you; there your mother conceived you, there she who was in labor gave you birth. 6 Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. 7 Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned.*

The bride has lost her identity in her lover. As He approaches, she clings to Him and is not recognizable apart from Him. This is where Christ longs to draw us. It is a place where those who see us associate us with Christ. We frequently find our place alone with Him and give Him our love. There is time for corporate worship, but if you do not spend time alone with Him, how can you say you truly love Him?

She asks for Him to place her like a seal over His heart, like a seal on His arm. He has done both. The pierced side and arms will forever be a seal of His love for us. He is at the right hand of the Father with those marks that proclaim His love. We could call them love wounds. When He first met with His disciples He displayed those marks to ease their fears. It is a love as strong as death. No greater love has anyone than to lay down their life for the one they love.

If He loves us like that, He will jealously guide us away from anything else that would compete for our affection and attention. That zeal for us is like a blazing fire. He would consume all else so we would be completely His. That is the picture you see as Jesus cleansed the Temple with a scourge of cords.

Meditation: What a love He has for us! You cannot purchase it. You cannot earn it. He has set His love upon you, and nothing can turn it from you. How will you respond?

**November 23 Evening**

James 1:2-4 *2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

This must certainly sound strange to most ears, joy in the face of trials. James explains that we should be joyful because the testing of our faith develops a quality of character in our life that is like that which Christ exhibited, perseverance. Without that quality, our effectiveness for the Lord will end when the going gets tough, and it will get tough. That is why the Lord allows the trials of many kinds to come our way.

Trials are like an old method of growing winter rye. When it sprouted, the farmer would tramp on it to keep it from growing. This caused the roots to grow deeper, finding more nourishment. It also kept the rye from maturing too quickly and freezing.

God is more concerned about your preparation for eternity than He is about your temporal happiness. He is making you into a mature and complete Christian, one who lacks nothing. The training process is not easy. Solid growth comes through difficult conditions.

Do you feel tromped on? Are you wondering why it is so hard when you are still so young in Christ? Trust the Great Farmer. He is working something into your life that you desperately need if you are going to produce fruit. It is the only path to maturity. So don’t complain; be joyful! God has a plan for your life. This trial is for a glorious purpose. You need it. You will learn more quickly when you recognize that it is a necessary process for your growth.

Meditation: The trials in my life are developing Christ like character. That is a reason for joy in the midst of them.

**November 24 Morning**

Isaiah 1:18-20 *18 "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. 19 If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; 20 but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

Any culture will express the value of their beliefs in the justice and compassion of their social life. Isaiah was prophesying to a culture that went through the motions of religion without sincerity of heart. Though they said they believed in God and justice, they lived lives that denied that claim. Greed was the driving force of the nation. Scales were not accurate. Justice was determined by bribery. The weak and poor were taken advantage of.

God allowed the enemies of Judah to rob and defeat them over and over again so that they would turn back to Him. They would turn back for a brief period and then would go right back to their idols that promised them the prosperity their greed desired. Still, God’s arms were open to them, and His voice called out to them to repent.

Your life expresses the value of your beliefs just as that culture expressed the heart of the people. In every action that God is dishonored, there is some kind of idolatry in our heart. God calls to us just as He called to them. Sit down with Him. Reason together with Him. He is willing to cleanse you and help you if you are willing. If you continue to be willing and obey what He shows you, then you will find the goodness of God in your daily life. If you rebel against His instruction, your sin will eventually destroy you.

Consider: What belief does my life express?

**November 24 Evening**

James 1:5-7 *5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord;*

What a wonderful promise we have in this passage! We are always in need of divine wisdom. James says that all we need to do is ask, but he also encourages us that God doles it out generously. God does not only give it to the perfect, holy person, but to whoever would ask. He is just waiting for us to ask. Wisdom that is from above will lead us in the way of righteousness. That is why you don’t have to have attained some state of perfection to ask for it. It is the path to a righteous life.

It is a revelation of the ways of God.

Lest we think we can ask in any state of mind, James warns that the one thing that is required is to believe and not doubt. Perfection is not required, but belief is. God will not inspire you with wisdom when you will doubt the wisdom He is ready to give. The picture is of a wave blown and tossed by the wind.

It is not that you must attain to some great state of faith, but you need to believe in the character of God. If you ask and doubt what He gives, you will treat His wisdom with skepticism and be worse off than when you started. That is an indication of self-trust. Then, with your own wisdom, you will weigh what God has given as just one of many choices. That makes you more accountable for ignoring His direction. If you are going to ask for wisdom, believe it is coming and accept it without wavering. He is glad that you asked and glad to give it.

Prayer: Lord, I need Your wisdom each day of my life. Help me to understand what is of You and by faith to follow it explicitly.

**November 25 Morning**

Isaiah 6:3-5 *3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. 5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."*

In Isaiah chapter 5, Isaiah was pronouncing words of woe to the corrupt society in which he lived. In chapter 6, the king had died. Isaiah went into the house of God and saw a vision of God’s throne. Angelic beings were flying about the throne singing to each other, *“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”* The sound of their voices was so powerful that the doorposts and foundations shook.

Isaiah was no longer pronouncing woes on others. There in the presence of God, in the light of His holiness, Isaiah saw his own sinfulness. He pronounced woe upon himself. A vision of God’s holiness reveals the depths of our sinfulness. The realization of his own depravity caused him to say he was ruined. The Hebrew word can be translated ‘unraveled’. Like a rug that had come unwoven, Isaiah felt as if he had fallen apart.

The first thing he noticed was the words he had spoken. The words we speak reveal our wicked heart. We live around people who are constantly speaking unkind, corrupt, and ungrateful words. We tend to speak like those we are around. In the light of God’s perfections, Isaiah saw this as his most blatant rebellion against God. We need a greater revelation of God to see by contrast how great our sin is and how desperately we need to change.

Consider: Jesus said that whoever loves truth comes to the light. Step into the light and let your need be revealed.

**November 25 Evening**

James 1:13-15 *13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death*.

Man tends to think that the temptation in front of him is from God. God never tempts us to sin. He does test us. There is a difference. To tempt is to entice to act contrary to God’s character. God would never do such a thing.

If a temptation is not from God, then we assume it is from the devil, just as the serpent tempted Eve. James says that temptation comes from our own evil desire. The devil only acts on the evil desire already in our heart. Don’t look outward when you give in to temptation. Look within your own heart. There is an evil desire there that is not surrendered to the lordship of Christ.

James draws an interesting picture of the process of that developing desire. You have probably seen it in others’ lives or even your own. First, the evil desire drags them away. That implies that the person is not totally willing to go in that direction. Desire can be a powerful force. Then it seduces your thoughts. The desire gives birth to sin. The grandchild of desire, through its son, sin, is death. The wages of sin is death. What a horrific chain of actions take place in the lives of those who allow evil desires to drag them away.

The only way out of the cycle is to submit your desires to the life changing power of Christ. If you have been crucified with Him, the desire is brought to the cross and dealt with.

Consider: Evil desires are like venomous snake pets. You may think you can handle them, but eventually they will kill you.

**November 26 Morning**

Isaiah 8:19-20 *19 When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? 20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.*

One of God’s complaints against his people was their willingness to seek direction from mediums and spiritists. When people turn their heart away from God, they will want to know what the future holds so that they can prepare for it.

Their fear is not their impending judgment, but circumstances they hope to avoid. They will not inquire of God because God would tell them to change their ways.

This fascination with knowing the future stems from a lack of faith and trust in God. If a person is walking in the Spirit, they trust God for each day. If there is a need to inquire about direction in life, they wait upon the Lord. The Great Shepherd cares for His sheep today and in the future. Only those who are wandering from the sheepfold will be desperate to know what tomorrow will bring. King Saul was such a person. He dared not inquire of God for he would not repent, so he sought out a witch to act as a medium.

Evil sources of information will often contradict what God has said. In this passage, Isaiah was told to not be like the people he lived among. He was told to continue to fear the Lord. The mediums will often bring up a person who will speak in contradiction to the Word of God. They had no light in life, and they have none in death. The dead have finished their time in this life. How can they help others where they failed? Jesus is the one that is victorious in life and death.

Consider: Wait upon the Lord. Seek Him. He will be our guide unto death.

**November 26 Evening**

James 1:25-27 *25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. 27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

James is a very practical preacher. His letter tells us that if the Word does not change us, it is our own fault. He describes the Word as a mirror for our soul. We can look into it and see the ugliness that needs to be changed, or we can walk away and forget what we have seen. The man who continues to look (notice how he switches to hearing) and takes action on what he hears is going to be blessed. Do you want to be blessed? Keep looking into the Word and acting on it. You will be freed from the bondage of sin.

If you do not continue to look and act on the Word, your life will show it. You may say you are a religious person, but your speech will betray you. Your communication will show that the religion you profess is worthless to you. It is worthless because you have not allowed it to change you.

Real religion that is acceptable to God is the kind that takes action. It helps those in need, and it keeps you from wallowing in the filth of the world.

Consider: Is your religion worthless, or the kind that God accepts as pure and faultless? Are you acting on what you see in the mirror of the Word?

**November 27 Morning**

Isaiah 9:6-7 *6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.*

In the midst of all of Isaiah’s prophecies of doom and gloom, he predicted a bright hope. He begins chapter 9 telling us the region of the coming Messiah’s ministry will be humbled now but honored in the future. He says they will see a great light and have joy. Why this turn around? A child will be born. God will be incarnated. A son will be given to us, the Son of God. The government of the Kingdom of God is on his shoulders. One day all government will be on his capable shoulders.

We call Him our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Isaiah said we would call Him by those names, and we do. None else could dare to claim any of those sacred titles. The end of Judah was coming, but there would be no end to the government and peace of the Messiah’s kingdom. We experience that even now. Two thousand years later the Kingdom of God has only grown. Though the world is at war, we have peace in our hearts.

He will reign on David’s throne. The nation of Judah had forgotten righteousness and justice, but the kingdom of the Messiah will uphold and establish righteousness and justice. How will this come to pass? The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish it! It is not a work of man.

Consider: The miraculous birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was accomplished through the zeal, that white hot burning love, that God has for us.

**November 27 Evening**

James 2:14-17 *14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead*.

Faith produces action. The early church must have had just as much trouble as we do when they realized that they were saved by faith in Christ. People looked on it as a magic formula. They thought if they understood what Christ did for them and voiced their acceptance of it, they had a guaranteed place in heaven. James is trying to tell them that genuine faith will result in actions. You can’t separate faith and actions. The actions don’t save us, but they will accompany the faith.

Jesus said the same thing by declaring that you will know a tree by its fruit. If someone has a real faith in Christ, then their actions will be like those of Christ.

James’ illustration was of meeting physical needs. You can tell a person to be fed and clothed, but it won’t do any good unless you take some kind of action to see that they receive the food and clothes. The analogy tells us that saying you have faith means nothing. The evidence of genuine faith is a transformed life.

If you have believed you were right with God but continued in your old life style, then you must come to the realization that you are fooling yourself. Repentance is a change of direction. To accept Christ as Lord implies that you are no longer the master of your life.

Consider: Is your faith alive? Is there enough evidence in your life to convict you of being a Christian? If not, go to the cross and die with Christ, and be raised to a new life in Him! Ask for the power of the Spirit to transform you daily.

**November 28 Morning**

Isaiah 26:3 *3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.*

Isaiah spent the previous chapters telling of all the destruction that was to come to Judah and the surrounding nations. Then he looked forward in time to when the nation of God’s people will enter their holy city. The walls and ramparts are salvation. God wipes away every tear from their eyes. It is the nation of believers who will not forsake their faith in God.

Because of that faith, God keeps them in perfect peace. The world goes through changes and turmoil. Nations rise and fall. So much of our sense of security is in the flimsiest of things, but those whose minds are steadfast, seeing the sovereignty of God, and the love and faithfulness of God, are kept in perfect peace. Perfect peace is not circumstantial. It is much deeper than passing things. They trust that God never changes. They trust that the love that He has shown them and His faithfulness and mercy will continue forever. There is no fear that He will ever change.

All else is fluid. All else is undependable. But the eye of faith looks past this passing world and sees the unchanging God. The peace that brings is perfect. It is deep and abiding. It is the peace He gives us. Do you know this peace? Where is your trust placed? If it is on some temporal thing, turn away from that today and learn to trust in the unchanging One.

Consider: Do you possess His peace?

**November 28 Evening**

James 3:17-18 *17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*

There are two kinds of wisdom. One is a wisdom that James calls “earthly, unspiritual, and of the devil”. It springs from envy and selfish-ambition.

The other kind of wisdom comes from heaven. It is pure, unpolluted by personal motives and agendas. You can accuse it of such, but in time it will be revealed to be without corruption. It is peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. You can use these descriptions for each fruit of the Spirit. They should be our plumb line for determining if our conversation is in the Spirit or in the flesh. They reveal the source of any wisdom being expounded, and there are only two sources.

Those who long to exert control, for the sake of envy and selfish ambition, sow conflict and divisiveness. They reap bitterness, anger, and animosity. The peacemakers exercise divine wisdom that is impartial. In doing so they reap a harvest of righteousness. By seeking the best for the kingdom of God, though they are submissive, they end up being blessed with a harvest of righteousness.

Prayer: Lord, help me to always express the wisdom that is from above. Guard my heart from earthly wisdom, and open it to your divine wisdom.

**November 29 Morning**

Isaiah 26:19-21 *19 But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead. 20 Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by. 21 See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her; she will conceal her slain no longer.*

In Isaiah 26, the prophet contrasts the hopelessness of the world with the hope of the people of God. He tells us that the world’s great ones come and go, forgotten. Their kingdoms rise and fall. God disciplines them, but they do not learn. He chastens them, but they refuse instruction.

The people of God are different. When God deals with them, they learn righteousness. Though they are oppressed and downtrodden by the world, they have the hope of this passage. The day is coming when God will do the treading upon those who do evil. He will come to judge the earth. No murders will be unsolved. No crimes will be hidden. There will be retribution for all evil done by those who have not repented and looked to God for salvation.

The people of God will rise from their graves. They will meet the LORD in the air. They world thinks it will silence the righteous by killing them, but they will return. The wrath of God will be poured upon the earth, and then they will return to rule and reign with Christ.

Are you looking forward to the hope that is set before us, or are your eyes set in the earth, on the passing things? Do you think evil will escape without justice being met? All sins will be dealt with, either by the redeeming blood of Jesus or the wrath of the Lamb. If you have chosen repentance and redemption your body will one day wake up and shout for joy.

Consider: Your death here is only the beginning of eternity in God’s presence. We have this hope!

**November 29 Evening**

James 4:1-3 *1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

Godly wisdom produces a peaceable environment. Worldly wisdom is always self-seeking and therefore erupts in strife. It starts with desires in the heart of man. If your desires are surrendered to your Creator, who you trust, then He will bring every needed thing into your life. Then you don’t have to vie with others for position and power. But if, on the other hand, you think that you must cunningly and shrewdly get the upper hand over others to get what you want, you will end up in a fight or quarrel with them.

God is the giver of all good things (James 1:17). All His children need to do is ask. The world believes success is to fight and quarrel and come out on top. It is the evolutionary mindset that tells us it is the strong that survive. The problem is that there is always someone stronger than you. Though you may not realize it, God is sovereign over all and stronger than all.

When we finally come to see that we must ask God, we often start with immature requests. We want to win the lottery. We want any number of things that are for our selfish pleasures. It is not that God does not want us to enjoy life, but that He knows what is truly good for us. His mercy keeps Him from giving us some of our requests. In time, we learn to ask for His will as He reveals it to us. That brings us into the truly blessed life.

Consider: Have you learned to pray according to the will of God? Not getting what we desire is often the mercy of God.

**November 30 Morning**

Isaiah 40:25-27 *25 "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. 26 Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these?*

*He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. 27 Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"?*

What will you compare God to? What or who has always been? Who is unchanging throughout eternity? How ridiculous to think we could make some image of our infinite Creator! How arrogant to think that we could give Him advice or suggest a better way than that which He has chosen!

Look at the stars on a clear night sky. You know you can only see a small fraction of them, and yet, God has each one set just where he would place it. It is there at His command and exists for His purposes. Each one has a name given it by its Creator, just as He intimately knows each of the billions of people on earth. None can hide or go unnoticed. We have a hard time remembering all the names of our few friends. When you contemplate God, do not compare Him with finite and error prone men.

Considering His greatness, considering His omniscience, dare we complain that God is not acting on our behalf? Do we think that somehow our case slipped by Him? Do we really believe He isn’t concerned? He knows every detail. He knows a million details about your situation that you are not aware of. Trust Him. He will one day help you see why things happened as they did. The one who places their trust in God will never be disappointed. He is the Holy One. He makes no mistakes.

Meditation: The Eternal One knows what I need and can bring into my life anything He deems necessary.

**November 30 Evening**

James 4:13-15 *13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."*

In the first century, there were more Jews living outside of Israel than inside its boundaries. God gifted them with a good sense of business. Cities that were being founded in remote areas would offer incentives to begin a business there. It gave Jews an opportunity to make large sums of money. The expression in the passage was quite common.

In our world, it is just as common. A business idea captures our imagination. Things start to fall into place, and before you know it, we are boasting about the great success we are about to experience. Our heart becomes enthralled with what we expect to take place.

James is warning us that life is transitory. Our vision needs to be fixed on the eternal. If God wills, we may have financial success, but we must always keep it in balance with the fact that it is temporary. When we keep our eyes on heaven, the business of this world cannot steal our hearts from what is truly important.

Consider: Watch a bit of steam from your kettle as it dissipates. That is a picture of the passing of our lives. What affect should that have on our attitude toward worldly things like business? If the Lord wills, I will still be living in this realm tomorrow. If He wills, I will leave it all behind and be at home with Him.

**December 1 Morning**

Isaiah 40:29-31 *29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. 30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*

In this awesome chapter about the incomparable greatness of God, Isaiah, closes with God’s ability to impact the lives of men. Though He is the high and Holy One, He gives His strength to those who are weary and weak. This is a theme that runs throughout Scripture. God does not help the self-reliant. Contrary to the popular expression, He does not help those who help themselves. He helps those who trust in Him. We must realize how helpless and needy man is. Then we can call out to God with our whole heart, without some man empowered backup plan. Our hope must be in God alone. Then He will meet us with the strength we need to endure.

Time and time again, God’s people have come to the end of themselves, and then God has done some great thing through them. It was when the body of Jesus was nailed to the cross and laid in a tomb that God brought about the greatest victory and greatest display of His strength in Jesus. It was when Elijah thought he was finished that God began to use him for the majority of his ministry. It was when Hezekiah had nowhere else to turn that God defeated the Assyrian army. We could go on to some of the modern missionaries. Many of them came to the end of themselves and some even to death before the ministry exploded with fruitfulness.

Whatever you situation or season in life, look to God. Look to His strength.

Don’t rely on your own wisdom or energy but on the life and strength of Christ.

Consider: When you think you can’t go on, and the need is there before you, hope in the LORD, and ask for a renewal of His strength. Then get ready to soar.

**December 1 Evening**

James 5:14-16 *14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

What should someone do when they are ill? James tells them to call the elders of the church to pray over them. It is such a clear and simple instruction, yet I find so few that are willing to follow it. We claim that we believe the Bible to be inspired by God, yet when we are in this situation, we do not follow this clear and simple instruction.

He did not tell the elders to chase them down and insist. The person who is sick is to express faith in the Word and the elders’ prayer of faith. They should be elders because of their strong faith in God. If there is sin in the sick person’s life, they should confess it. The elders need to be men who can keep it confidential.

Once these prerequisites are met, the elders can pray a prayer of faith, anointing the person with oil. The oil is symbolic of the presence of the Holy Spirit at work. The prayer of faith from the elders is a prayer that believes God hears and will act. They expect the Lord to forgive and heal them.

Consider: When you find yourself battling an illness, humble yourself before God, and search your heart. Call your elders together (the men you recognize as men of faith), and confess your sins. Ask them to anoint you with oil and pray for you in accordance with this passage. Then you will have done all that God has directed. If you remain ill, there must be a special purpose for that affliction in your life. (i.e.: Apostle Paul’s thorn)

**December 2 Morning**

Isaiah 52:13-15 *13 See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. 14 Just as there were many who were appalled at him-- his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness-- 15 so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand*.

Isaiah gave a number of prophecies about the suffering servant. They so beautifully describe the life of Jesus that it is a wonder some cannot see it and that the Jews of that day did not recognize Him. The wisest thing Jesus could have done for those He loved was to lay down His life. In the passage today, we see the cross raised, lifted into place, and the Son of God highly exalted. Though His body was beaten and torn beyond human recognition, He became the sacrifice whose blood would be our atonement.

Kings bow before the wonder of His sacrificial death. They cannot speak in the presence of One whose love is so great that He would die to give them life. Pilate did not know the prophecies were being fulfilled before his eyes. Kings have not heard the Gospel and yet somehow will know that God has made a Way. God has revealed His Arm, Christ Jesus, and ever since the world has looked in awe at the wonder of His life and death in our place.

Who would ever have guessed that God loved us to that extent? We sit in silence pondering the amazing love of God and our lack of gratitude for it. How could He love us so? The suffering Servant bore our sins that we might forever be right with God. Let the wonder of it grow within your heart.

Consider: See that you never grow calloused toward that great display of His love for you.

**December 2 Evening**

1 Peter 1:6-8 *6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,*

Peter is expressing the paradox of the Christian life. We have a glorious inheritance ahead of us. Until we get there, we are kept by the power of God. He says that this causes us to greatly rejoice. If you aren’t greatly rejoicing, you haven’t seen the wonder of what lies before us, or you haven’t seen His power that is keeping us until we get there. Joy should be the distinguishing characteristic of every Christian.

The paradox is that the journey is full of trials. Those trials cause grief, but they also accomplish a purpose. They prove our faith like precious metal is purified by fire. They burn out the impurities of our worldly ideas and misguided doctrines.

So how are we supposed to be joyful in those painful trials that cause us grief?

We see they are serving a purpose. We see our faith growing stronger and purer. We look forward with eyes of faith to our Savior’s glorious return and realize that it is worth it. To hear His, “Well done!” will be more than worth it. As we envision that day and the heart of our Savior who is shaping us for that day, we are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, even as we endure the grief of these momentary trials.

Consider: You are probably in a trial, coming out of one, or going into one. Good! They will refine and test your faith so that you can hear Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:21a) Look to that day with eyes of faith and be filled with inexpressible and glorious joy.

**December 3 Morning**

Isaiah 53:4-6 ***4*** *Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.* ***5*** *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.* ***6*** *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all*.

Isaiah 52:13 through chapter 53 contains some of the most detailed and rich prophecies concerning the Messiah. The most comforting are those in our passage for today. Man’s greatest infirmity is sin. His greatest sorrow is his estrangement from God. Jesus took that upon Himself while He was on the cross. We cannot comprehend the horror of the sins of the world, but Jesus could. He still took it on for us. Even in the process of dying for man, men cursed, mocked, and insulted Him. They implied that He deserved it for being a liar. Still He went through with it, to the end.

Why was He pierced? For our transgressions! Why was He crushed? For our iniquities! Don’t pass that over without making it personal. The only way we could have peace with God is for someone to pay the sin debt we owed. Someone had to be punished for the rebellion against God and all His goodness. The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him.

How could we be healed from this disease of sin that so permeates our nature? By His wounds we are healed! Every one of us is like a dumb sheep that wonders away from the Shepherd that cares and looks after us. We wonder off into the dangerous areas in which we can be attacked and devoured by the Wolf. If we were caught and killed, it would serve us right, for we have refused to follow our loving Shepherd. Yet, the LORD laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all.

Consider: How grateful, how thankful, how forever indebted we are to Him!

**December 3 Evening**

1 Peter 1:13-16 *13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. 14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*

Because God has orchestrated your salvation through the wonder of the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, prepare your minds for action! If He went to all that effort to save you, He must have something for you to do. Of course, He desires a relationship with you above all else, but relationship results in actions. Start preparing your mind for the work of infiltrating the world as an agent of Almighty God.

Be self-controlled. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. Let that fruit come to fruition in your life. Once you realize what important assignments God has for you, you will want to be disciplined as you prepare for them. We aren’t just laboring for a worldly empire, but for the Lord of all. Get it together! Stop fooling around. This is serious business. You used to just conform to your evil desires. There is no time for that anymore.

Your hope should be placed on the grace that will be lavished on you when Jesus appears in glory. With your eyes fixed on that day, live a holy life. That means a life that is set apart for His purposes. He is the standard. He is holy, and that is why we should be holy in everything we do. Be holy in your thoughts and the way your time is spent. Be holy in your desires and aspirations. He is worthy of that response.

Consider: Are my thought life and self-discipline reflecting the high calling I have in Christ?

**December 4 Morning**

Isaiah 55:7-9 *7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. 8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

The cry of God is for us to come to Him. This chapter begins pleading for us to come and take the water and bread of life freely. He pleads for us to seek the LORD, and then begins to give this summary of why we need to come to God. We have gone our own way. Man has decided he does not need his Creator. God has graciously directed man in a way that is not self-destructive, but man refuses to walk in it. We are arrogant enough to think we can come up with a better and more satisfying way. That is the same problem Eve had in the Garden. Our lusting eyes and confused minds lead us into a way that is opposed to the way of God.

Our thoughts that are not yielded to the Spirit of God are the beginning of this downward spiral. God actually wants us to think His thoughts. A life yielded to the Spirit thinks God’s thoughts, thoughts in line with the character of God. We cannot keep a thought from passing through our mind, but we can decide not to dwell on it.

This is God’s charge against man: our ways and thoughts are not His ways and thoughts. His are pure. Ours are corrupt. His are good and just. Ours are evil and self-serving. He actually wants us to forsake our ways and thoughts and take in the life of the Son. We are to have the mind of Christ. Does this sound impossible? Jesus died to make it possible for the Spirit of God to live in you.

Consider: If you have received Him, simply let the Word of God live in you richly (Colossians 3:16). His life will shine through you as you walk in His ways and yield your mind to His thoughts.

**December 4 Evening**

1 Peter 2:5,9,11 *5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

*9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

*11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.*

Peter tells us what God is doing with our lives. He is making us into a spiritual house in which He can live by His Spirit. In this analogy, he is not referring to us individually, but as a group. We should be interconnected to the work and ministry of others in the family of God. Like the priests of old, we minister to God by bringing sacrifices, but instead of animals, we bring sacrifices of praise for bringing us out of darkness and into His wonderful light. They are acceptable because they come through Jesus our Savior.

God is making us into a royal and holy priesthood. What He intended to do with Israel, He is now accomplishing in us. Israel could not be a priestly nation because they did not have the Holy Spirit within them. They could not see how much they needed God. The flesh can never accomplish the will of God.

Because we have this high and holy calling, we should not follow the example of ancient Israel that was ensnared by their sinful desires. As a nation, they lost the war over their souls. As a nation, let us live as aliens and strangers here, knowing that we are just passing through this world. Let us abstain from those sinful desires that would take us down the same road to ruin that Israel took.

Consider: Am I compromising with the enemy in any area of my life? As a stranger and alien here, what should I do about it?

**December 5 Morning**

Isaiah 57:14-15 *14 And it will be said: "Build up, build up, prepare the road! Remove the obstacles out of the way of my people." 15 For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite*.

Is there a cleared highway for Jesus to enter your heart? Before a great dignitary of Rome would enter a city, a work crew would go before and make sure obstacles were cleared from the road. Damaged areas were repaired, and washed out areas were filled in. Have you done as much for the Lord Jesus? Does He have a clear path to your heart, desires, and plans? This passage was written to a nation that had idolatry and greed in their roads, but it is applicable to us too.

The God of eternity, who transcends space and time, who sees and knows all things that ever were and are or will be, is utterly separate from us. He can at the same time be the One who orders all things and yet comes to the hurting soul in need with a gentle word. Pride holds out a stiff arm to God. Humility and recognition of need draw us to an intimate place with Him. Could the blockage in our road be the pride that causes us to go our own way without consulting Him? He promises to live with the contrite and lowly person. It takes humility to say, “I need Thee, oh, I need Thee. Every hour I need Thee!” It takes humility to repent of going our own way.

If you want the presence of God in your life and the voice of God to renew and encourage you, you need a heart that is humble and repentant. Whatever would block the road by keeping you from that state of heart and mind must be removed.

Consider: Check the roadway of your heart. Is it open to our Savior?

**December 5 Evening**

1 Peter 3:1-4 *1 Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, 2 when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. 3 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. 4 Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight*.

In many homes, the woman is more spiritual than her husband. She longs for a man that will lead the home spiritually, and so she often prods her husband. Maybe prod is too gentle a word, how about “nags”? She leaves books open to chapters that explain his faults, and cuts out articles that describe men with similar shortcomings. She always invites him to church, but he rarely gives in. Every once in a while it all gets to be too much, and she just lets him have it, declaring how she wishes he were a better husband.

That may be the natural reaction of a wife to an unspiritual husband, but Peter says it is not the way to win him. It has the opposite effect. Because he feels he can never measure up to her high idea of spirituality, he avoids spiritual things altogether. Don’t forget, men like to win. If they feel their wife will out perform them at church, they just won’t go.

Peter teaches that the love and honor that the wife gives the husband will win his heart. It draws him near. It doesn’t take words; it takes a pure and reverent life with the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. Not only will that be beautiful to your husband, but to God as well.

Consider: Have you been trying to change your husband? You can only change yourself. Peter is describing a woman that is overflowing with the fruit of the Spirit. She realizes that inner beauty is infinitely greater than outward beauty. A powerful woman has her tongue under control and her hope in God.

**December 6 Morning**

Isaiah 61:1-3 *1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor*.

Jesus opened to this passage in the synagogue of His hometown. He said it was fulfilled in their ears as He read it. He knew the passage was about Him. At first they marveled. It wasn’t that they were angry at His claim of being anointed, for they had watched Him grow up and knew He was different. They became angry when He said they would not receive Him but the Gentiles would.

Why was the Spirit of the Sovereign LORD on Him? He was anointed to preach the good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, and to proclaim freedom to captives and prisoners. His message of God’s love for the humble was a joy to the poor who thought God had rejected them. The priests of that day gave the impression that those who were blessed physically were blessed because they kept all the rules. That implied that the handicapped and poor and sick were all unacceptable to God. Jesus’ teaching was just the opposite. He declared that they were the ones that God was near.

Do we have Jesus’ perspective? It was an understanding that God loves and cares for the hurting. He wants to give a garment of praise in place of a spirit of despair. Hear the good news. Jesus was anointed so that His healing, liberating touch can be upon your life.

Meditation: Let His good news transform you into an oak of righteousness, a planting for the display of His splendor.

**December 6 Evening**

1 Peter 4:7-8 *7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. 8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*

If the end was near then, it is certainly much nearer now. The end of the Temple worship system and the world as they knew it was at hand. Our world can change in a moment too. When chaos strikes, if we are not clear minded and self-controlled, we will be swept along with the crowd. We should be praying for God’s people and those in the valley of decision. We should be looking for opportunities to share with those seeking real answers. Only when the Spirit of God is our guide through daily life, will we be able to hear His guidance when our world goes mad.

Peter reminds us that love is to be the one gift we put above all others. This love is not the fickle kind that demands a certain response or it will be withdrawn. This is a love that covers a multitude of sins. It is a love that is willing to overlook offenses. Peter calls it a deep love. It is should be as deep as the well of Christ’s love for you. What He has given you He expects you to pass on to others.

Love is the one thing that will keep your priorities straight when things fall apart. It will keep you from the natural instinct to put yourself first for preservation so that you can be aware of the needs around you. This is the kind of love Jesus demonstrated in Gethsemene. “If it is me you are seeking, then let these go.” He was clear minded and self-controlled, and so He was able to pray in preparation for the time of trouble. He overlooked His disciples’ desertion because of His deep love for them.

Prayer: Lord, please help me to always be clear minded and self-controlled so that I can pray. Help me to let your deep love flow to my brothers and sisters in Christ that I may be ready to forgive.

**December 7 Morning**

Isaiah 62:1, 6-7 *1 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch.*

*6 I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, 7 and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth*.

The Lord desires our constant intercession. He asks us to pray without ceasing. Regardless of how you interpret Zion and Jerusalem, we have the call to not remain silent. We need to share the great love of our God until so many enter the Kingdom of God that righteousness shines like the dawn and their salvation like a blazing torch. The more an area is converted and sharing by their life’s example, the more the Spirit of God dominates that area. People can’t help but come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, because He has such freedom to work through the prayers of God’s people.

The LORD pleads with us to never rest from intercession. He wants us to give Him no rest, but to bombard heaven with requests for salvation and the transformation of lives.

One day the heavenly city will be established in Jerusalem. The world will come to worship on bended knee, confessing Jesus as LORD. Peace and righteousness will be the order of the Kingdom, but until that day comes keep praying. Keep interceding for the lost. Keep heaven busy with your prayer requests. Don’t be silent! Don’t let entertainment steal your time that has eternal worth. Pray!

Consider: How does this verse apply to you and your city?

**December 7 Evening**

1 Peter 5:2-4 *2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*

Peter is addressing the elders that read the letter to the local church. You will find that the New Testament always addresses elders in a city in the plural. The elders were the overseers of each church. They are to serve willingly, not out of obligation. Shepherding a congregation has many difficulties. It isn’t a job that was readily desired, for it means going above and beyond in service. It means a life that exemplifies the life of Christ.

The elders are not chosen for their status in life. Some might come from a low income level and find the support of the believers to be more than they made in their business. Usually the opposite is true, but in their case, they should not serve because of the possibility of increased finances. From rich or poor backgrounds, elders should serve because God wants them to. An elder’s chief desire should be to please the Lord.

The elders are not to throw their weight around in an authoritarian way. In everything, they should be an example to the flock. Even when discipline is necessary, they should do it with love and gentleness. For this life of service and sacrifice, there is a promise to look forward to. The Chief Shepherd will give the faithful ones a crown of glory that will never fade.

Consider: Are you praying for your shepherds? It is easy to criticize their service, but would you want their job? They must answer to the Chief Shepherd. Help them be willing servants by your encouragement and prayers. What does a good sheep do?

**December 8 Morning**

Isaiah 66:1-2 *1 This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? 2 Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word*.

We cannot build a house for God. We can build places in which to worship. We can build meeting places, but God is so much greater than our buildings. He cannot be limited to a building. Every ingredient in the building was a creation of God reworked by men gifted from God. Will our buildings impress Him?

He is the one who is making a building for Himself. He is using living stones to build it. Jesus told Peter, “I will build my church.” (Matthew 16:18) He reaches into the hearts of men and convicts of sin. He draws them into a relationship with Himself, and molds and shapes them throughout their lives. After He has hewn off all that does not fit in His temple, He places them in the spot prepared for them. What does a hewn living stone look like? It appears humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at God’s Word. Your spiritual maturity can be measured by these characteristics.

In this passage, God was blasting Israel for taking His Word so lightly. He says that He called and they would not listen. He stretched out His hands to them, but they would not come. The temple was in ruins, and so they cried out to God. This passage today was His reply. He is building a temple of people who will listen and come to Him. The stones He chooses are humble and contrite. Those are the kind of stones He esteems. He listens to those who listen to Him.

Consider: Are you listening today? Are you letting Him mold and shape you? Is the process humbling you so that you tremble at His Word?

**December 8 Evening**

1 Peter 5:7-9 *7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. 8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings*.

If you have worries and concerns that are weighing you down, you need to find someone who can help you carry them or assure you that they can help you through them. But who doesn’t have enough worries of their own? And who cares enough to share those burdens? And who has the power to really assist you through the circumstances of life? Jesus! He cares! And He invites you to cast your cares on Him. He can either change the situation, or give you the grace to get through it by carrying your load.

Some of the struggles we face are the attacks of Satan in our life. He is looking for sheep that have strayed away from the Shepherd. Like a lion, he lurks in the shadows waiting for the lamb that might wander off looking for some kind of curiosity. He doesn’t dare go near the sheep that are close to the Shepherd, for the Shepherd has a big rod.

What should you do when in following that nice swath of grass you are drawn into your enemy’s reach? Resist him! Bleat! Call out to the Shepherd, while standing firm in your faith. Expect the Shepherd to come bounding toward the enemy with giant leaping strides. Know in your heart that lambs around the world are undergoing the same kind of attacks. The Shepherd has the amazing ability to be there for each one of them. We may suffer some injury because we have strayed so far, or because of the enemy’s subtleties. We can rest assured that the Shepherd will bind our wounds and carry us until we have recovered.

Consider: What concerns are on my heart today that I need to cast upon my Lord? After casting them, I must keep from reeling them back in.

**December 9 Morning**

Jeremiah 1:5, 9-10 *5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." 9 Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. 10 See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."*

Archeologists have discovered extra-biblical evidence that Jeremiah and his scribe, Baruch, existed. Pottery shards have been discovered upon which someone complained that the prophet’s message was demoralizing. Jeremiah was telling the nation to surrender to their captors because God had determined the nation must go into exile. During the battle for Jerusalem, Baruch’s seal was buried and remained there until it was uncovered in this century.

In the introduction to Jeremiah, we read of the call of God upon his life. God had ordained him to be the prophet of doom before he was even formed in his mother’s womb. What did God make you to be? The psalmist said that the days of our lives were ordained before our birth, (Psalm 139:16) yet, we have the freedom to choose. Are you walking in God’s ordained plan for your life?

In Jeremiah’s case, God put His words in Jeremiah’s mouth. His message was to foretell the fall and return of the nation of Judah. Because he had such a message of doom, he shed many tears and was called the weeping prophet. Though the nation rejected God’s message, Jeremiah faithfully delivered it. It was a lonely job, and though he was tempted to refuse to do it, he was faithful to the end. What an example to us to live in God’s call for us!

Consider: Let us be faithful to walk in all that God has called us to that we might have the testimony of being faithful to God.

**December 9 Evening**

2 Peter 1:3-5 *3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;*

Jesus came to rescue us from a fate worse than death. He came to make it possible for us who receive Him to have the power of the Holy Spirit so that we may truly know life and godliness. Life and godliness come through our increasing knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.

Through the goodness and glory of God, we have received very great and precious promises. We know He will never leave us or forsake us. We know that He will finish the work He started in us. We know that He will one day wipe away every tear from our eyes. We know that He will strengthen us with power through the Spirit in our inner being.

It is through these precious promises that we participate in His nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. We hold our evil desires alongside these great promises and see that the desires are not only deceitful but destructive. We would much rather cling to the great and precious promises.

Because of the great promises of God that help us participate in His nature, we are to make every effort to increase in the likeness of His nature. Peter made a list of attributes that we, through cooperation with the Holy Spirit, should make every effort to see increased in us.

Consider: Peter encourages us to make every effort. Are you? Look at the list in 2 Peter 1:5-7 and see where you may need to increase your efforts in cooperation with God’s Spirit in you.

**December 10 Morning**

Jeremiah 2:11-13 *11 Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols. 12 Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the LORD.13 "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.*

Glory is the image of God upon us. When we act according to the attributes of God, people get a glimpse of the glory of God. Israel was to display to the world what it was like to be in relationship with God. That task is now entrusted to the Church. This passage declares God’s astonishment at man’s senselessness. How could they exchange the Living God, who had brought them out of captivity in Egypt, for things made by the hands of man? Why would they want to exchange the Eternal God for some worthless images?

Then the LORD points out the two great sins of Israel with an analogy. He says they have forsaken the spring of living water. Water is very scarce in Israel. Springs are like gold! Cities are built around them because of their consistent supply of cool, fresh, life-giving water. Why would anyone forsake a spring in Israel? But they forsook the LORD who was their source of life.

The second sin was digging out a cistern. Cisterns are large holes cut into the limestone at low points on the earth’s surface. When there are rains, the terrain drains the runoff into this hole that opens up below the surface to the size of a swimming pool. But being cracked, it just drained into the earth. The life giving spring was forsaken for a useless cistern.

Consider: Where are you going for a drink of life? Only the spring of living water will truly satisfy. Let us make our dwelling around the spring, and go to it often. Then the world will see the glory of the LORD upon us.

**December 10 Evening**

2 Peter 1:20-21 *20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

The Scriptures are not just the ideas of man. They did not originate in the will of man. There was a much greater power guiding and carrying their speech and writings. The world would call them inspired. That literally means breathed into. In this passage we have more of a sense of being picked up by a hurricane and carried. Certainly there was the personality of the prophet involved, but the hand of the omnipotent God was moving his thought and speech. It was not that they were robots without a will, but neither did the ideas and words originate in them.

God works in the same way with us today. He uses the personality that He designed to fit into the purpose for which He created us. We think we came up with a wonderful idea, but all along it was planned before we were created. The Spirit of God carries us into places of ministry and divine encounters that we might think had their origin in our will, but were always a part of His marvelous plan for our lives and His glory.

Keep your eyes open to the wonderful workings of God in your life. Realize that He is intricately involved in the details of your life. When something amazing happens, know that He planned it before He created you. Rejoice in the wonderful plans He prepared in advance for you.

Meditation: Am I reading God’s Word with reverence for the incredible way in which He brought it to me?

**December 11 Morning**

Jeremiah 6:13-15 *13 "From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. 14 They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace. 15 Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them," says the LORD.*

God’s cry against the people was that there could not be found one righteous in Judah. He declared that Israel was not as bad as Judah had become. The passage today lists some of the specific sins they were guilty of. It is hard for us to relate to the idolatry, worshipping carved images, but we can readily relate to the greed. Greed for wealth had permeated the entire nation from the beggar to the king. When our eyes turn from God to the things that He has made, we seek security in possessions. We should be looking to God who is the giver of all good things. Instead we trust in His gifts and focus on how to attain them.

The prophets and priests were all practicing deceit. The very ones people looked to for truth were deceiving the people in the name of God. In this generation we have seen a number of big name religious personalities who were caught in their deceit. How many more go uncaught? Only God knows. Consider their way of life and the fruits of the Spirit in their lives, not just their ability to impress you.

The religious leaders preached peace when destruction was coming upon them. When they should have been preaching conviction of sin, they taught that everything was fine. The woeful thing is that it did not even bother their conscience. They had done it for so long that their hearts were hardened against God. A comfortable today was their only goal. They were about to face judgment.

Consider: God cannot ignore evil in any nation, group, or individual that is unrepentant. In His perfect time, justice will be served.

**December 11 Evening**

2 Peter 3:3-4, 8-9 *3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."*

*8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

The previous chapter predicted that false teachers would come, driven by a desire for pleasure and money. In this chapter, Peter warns that scoffers would also come in the last days. This began in earnest about 150 years ago. We refer to it as the age of skeptical criticism. “Scoffers” is more to the point.

They argue that the world is on a slow and steady progressive path of evolutionary advancement. Now, science is showing that cataclysmic events did occur in the earth’s history. The earth did not slowly progress with only gradual changes but has had a violent past with sudden changes. Still, man feels more comfortable to think of things going on with only gradual change. The return of Christ is the farthest thing from their minds. Twisted Bible interpretations lull lukewarm Christians into a false sense of security.

Peter warns us that it is the patience and love of God that keeps Jesus’ return from taking place sooner. God’s time and our time are quite different. These last two thousand years are merely two days to Him. His chief concern is the repentance of mankind. “Behold, I come quickly!” Revelation 22:7a Jesus said that just two days ago in God’s perception of time. He is coming again, and that will bring a drastic and sudden change to all creation.

Consider: Whether He comes today or you live to 100 years of age, our time to invest in eternity is short. The scoffers argument is shortsighted and blind to the love of God.

**December 12 Morning**

Jeremiah 9:23-24 *23 This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD*.

Jeremiah’s prophecies are painful to read. The people of Judah are described as being so hardhearted that nothing will get through to them. Though God refines them by trial after trial, they would not be purified. Though He called to them again and again, they would not listen. They boasted that they knew the Law of God, but they would not obey it. Exile was the only tool left to change them. What a warning for us today!

The LORD told them if they were going to boast about anything, then it should not be their wisdom, or their strength, or their riches. The only thing that man can boast about is knowledge and understanding of the LORD. Knowing His divine attributes of kindness, justice and righteousness is something you can boast in. God delights in those things.

At first glance, kindness and justice seem to be in contrast. His justice was sending them into exile, while their soldiers’ bodies lay unburied in the fields. Was that kindness? Absolutely! God had tried everything else, and they refused to turn. For the sake of the generations to come, for the sake of the seed that was to bring the Messiah, the kindest thing was disaster to crack their hardheartedness.

We should consider that God delights in kindness. He would rather pour blessings upon us for our willingness to hear and obey than to pour the kindness of wrath to wake us from sin.

Consider: Where are you in this picture? Perhaps you can answer with less bias when you consider what you boast in.

**December 12 Evening**

2 Peter 3:14-16 *14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. 15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.*

Peter had just warned his readers that the world would be destroyed by fire.

Since everything here will go up in smoke, we should be looking forward to the new heaven and earth, a home of righteousness. How should that affect our daily lives? We should be endeavoring to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with our Lord. This does not mean that we are earning our salvation, but that when our time comes, we have nothing left of the world that will be destroyed. Christians whose hearts are still set on things of the passing world will not find the transition as wonderful as those who are at peace with the Lord. Peace with the Lord means our affections are toward Him and not the things of the world.

Peter adds that Paul has written the same thing. He makes an interesting comment in regards to Paul’s letters. He compares them to sacred writings. Peter writes that the unlearned distort the meaning of both. We will always have people who use the sacred writings to their own personal desire and advantage. Actually, it is to their disadvantage, though they do not realize it. They twist the Scriptures to justify an attachment to worldliness, to pleasures and wealth. What they set their heart upon will perish.

Consider: Am I reading into Scripture a justification for worldliness or living with the realization that it will all perish?

**December 13 Morning**

Jeremiah 14:13-15 *13 But I said, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, the prophets keep telling them, 'You will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed, I will give you lasting peace in this place.'" 14 Then the LORD said to me, "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds. 15 Therefore, this is what the LORD says about the prophets who are prophesying in my name: I did not send them, yet they are saying, 'No sword or famine will touch this land.' Those same prophets will perish by sword and famine*.

There will always be false prophets among us. It was a problem throughout the Old Testament. The comparable problem in the days of the New Testament is the false teacher (2 Peter 2:1). They preached the delusions of their own minds, just as the prophets of old spoke the delusions of their minds. The church is plagued by these characters today. Every time one of them gives a time frame or a date, carefully note it on the calendar along with their prediction. When they prove not to be true, you know they are speaking their own delusions.

They seem to have a supernatural insight into what you want to hear, so it is enticing to believe them without question. The Apostle Paul warns us to let others weigh carefully what is said (1 Corinthians 14:29). If it is appealing to you, take extra caution. If it exalts you, if it causes you to consider yourself above others, red flags should go up. False prophets know how to appeal to our egos and insecurities.

By their fruit you shall know them (Matthew 7:20). Are they willing to share their life of sacrifice and service, or are they greedy for gain and honor. Are they secret about their use of their time and finances? A servant will be like his Master. Are they like Jesus or are they cunningly like the Deceiver? They are storing up wrath for the Day of Judgment.

Meditation: If they do not speak according to the Word, they are in darkness.

**December 13 Evening**

1 John 1:1-2, 5 *1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.*

*5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.*

John was writing decades after he saw Jesus ascend into heaven. During that time, strange beliefs and theories about Jesus had sprung up. One of them was the thought that Jesus was not a physical being, but an apparition. John knew it was important for Christians to understand that Jesus became a man. They heard Him with their ears, saw Him with their eyes, and touched Him with their hands. He was the Word of life made flesh.

He was forever with God. He is Eternal Life. He was manifested so that we could know the love of God. It is important to understand that as a man, He took back what Adam gave up in the Garden. By living a perfect life, He became the perfect sacrifice who could take our sins because He had none of His own to die for. The Seed of the woman crushed the authority of Satan and took back dominion over the earth (Genesis 3:15).

God is light! He does not have some hidden darkness within His character. There are no secret attributes that would make us shudder. There is absolutely nothing of darkness in Him. He is utterly holy. He is love. He has nothing to hide. What a God! It is not possible to imagine a more perfect God.

Meditation: God, in all His perfection, became a human being, in order that you could enter the Light of Eternal Life. Let Him purge all darkness from your life as you enter into Him.

**December 14 Morning**

Jeremiah 17:5, 9 *5 This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD.*

*9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*

Man’s very nature turns him away from God and turns him to the ability of man. If it is not self that we rely upon, then it is the ability of another. It takes a revelation and the grace of God to turn us away from man to place our trust in God. Why is it so difficult to see that God is more reliable and capable than man? It seems like such any easy decision, and yet over and over again we turn to man.

The passage here says that will place a curse upon our self. The natural outcome of trusting in corrupted man will be some kind of curse in our lives.

After the 10,000th failure, one would think we would get the idea and turn to God. Why don’t we learn? It is because it is engrained in our deceitful hearts. We even deceive ourselves! This nature within us is so bent on staying free from the influence of God that it will choose self-destruction before it will trust in His incredibly gracious plan for us. The heart is beyond cure. You can’t develop a mental exercise, or a magic pill, or a special chant that will cure your heart. The only hope is a new heart. We were born in need of a heart transplant. Is there a donor anywhere to be found?

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (NIV) *26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.* Jesus will give us His own broken heart if we are willing to receive it. It comes with selfless concern for others, a willingness to lay down your life, and most of all, a will to please the Father. Will you receive it?

Consider: Do I have that new heart, or am I trusting in the old one?

**December 14 Evening**

1 John 1:6-7, 9 *6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

*9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

God is light. There is no darkness in Him at all. If we claim to be in vital communication with God, and yet reserve an area of darkness for ourselves, we lie. We are not living in truth. God will not tolerate that darkness. It will have to go, or it will keep you from God.

When we give up those areas of darkness, we find we are free to share our lives with one another. We no longer have anything to hide. Jesus in our brothers and sisters challenged us to forsake the darkness. That is why we avoid being with them when we have those reservations. We make all kinds of excuses about their problems, but the real problem is that Jesus in them challenges us to give it all up.

In fellowship with the body of Christ, our lives are continually cleansed and transformed in an ever-increasing way. When we see that darkness has invaded our thoughts or desires, we should confess and forsake it. Then we experience forgiveness and increasing purification. You can know that God will always be faithful and just to honor what Jesus did for you on the cross. Don’t fall into condemnation. Stay in fellowship with God and your spiritual family.

Consider: Are you making excuses to avoid fellowship with the body of Christ? Whatever your excuse, it will not stand the litmus test of Scripture. Examine your own heart for areas of darkness. Walk in the light. Walk in fellowship with God and His family.

**December 15 Morning**

Jeremiah 20:8-9,11 *8 Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. [[4]](#footnote-4) But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot*.

*11 But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten.*

Jeremiah complained that God didn’t tell him all that he was getting into when he was called to be a prophet. God never tells us everything upfront, for that wouldn’t be good for us. God will tell us what we are able to hear when we are able to hear it.

Jeremiah was proclaiming a message among people who hated what he had to say. This made him the object of mockery and scorn. There were even plots to assassinate him. Jeremiah would have liked to just quit speaking God’s words. There was one problem. The word was in his heart like a fire. If he tried to hold it in, it would weary him with effort. He just couldn’t keep quiet.

Jeremiah was proclaiming destruction and misery, but we have the words of life to proclaim. How blessed we are that our message is one of hope and salvation. Yet, it is also a message of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In that sense, it is like Jeremiah’s message. We are preaching the need to surrender. People will mock and scorn us as they did Jeremiah, because they do not want to change their ways. We may want to quit speaking the truth, just as Jeremiah did, but His word is in us like a pent up fire.

Consider: We have one great consolation. The LORD is with you, reader. He is with you like a mighty warrior.

**December 15 Evening**

1 John 2:5-6, 9 *5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.*

9 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness.

If we don’t have love, we are only fooling ourselves. We may have a form of religion. We may have a desire to be good or even to please God, but we are missing something vital. The presence of Jesus in us will manifest Himself as the love of God through us. John saw the love of God as one of the main characteristics of Jesus. If Jesus is living in us, that characteristic will be in our lives as well. To walk as Jesus walked is to demonstrate love for God and our fellow man in all we do and say.

We cannot hate our brother if we are in the light. Hatred is an expression of darkness. It demonstrates the true condition of our heart. Hatred is antithetical to the presence of Jesus in us. If Christ is in communion with us, we will find it impossible to go on hating a person. His presence will change our perspective to understanding, compassion, and love. The mind of Christ will reveal the causes of a person’s offensive behavior. Then we will hate the sin, but love the person enslaved by it, even when they hurt us. They know not what they do.

This love is something the world cannot understand. It is one characteristic that makes us stand out as different from others. They don’t know how to explain it. We may be considered gullible or ignorant, but it is the unbeliever who is ignorant of the power of the love of God.

Consider: Is the love of God being truly made complete in me?

**December 16 Morning**

Jeremiah 23:3-5 *3 "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. 4 I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD. 5 "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.*

The chapter begins with the LORD rebuking the unfaithful shepherds for scattering the flock of God. Then the LORD says that He will gather them from wherever they have been scattered and place shepherds over them. Like many prophecies, this has an immediate and final fulfillment. The people of Judah were soon to come back from Babylon and would become fruitful and increase. They were gathered from wherever they were scattered in 1948 and became very fruitful and increased even more. Ultimately this may refer to Second Coming. In the rapture, Jesus will gather His sheep from wherever they are scattered. Is there any other way to see the total lack of fear and none missing? In the other restorations not all returned. Fear was a daily part of life then and now. But when the LORD returns, He will sit a King and reign in righteousness and justice. We can look forward to that day with hope and expectation.

He is referred to as the righteous Branch that is raised up to David. Jesus was the lineage of David. Several places in Scripture we have a picture of a lineage as a tree. There has never been a king over the land, descended from David, who was righteous, since that prophecy. But that day is coming.

Consider: We can look forward to the just and righteous reign of our King, the King of kings, the Branch of David.

**December 16 Evening**

1 John 2:15-17 *15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world-the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*

John breaks down for us three categories that describe everything in the fallen world: cravings of sinful man, lust of the eyes, and boasting of what he has and does. When the Bible speaks of the world, there are several meanings. One is mankind itself. The other is this definition that God has given in this verse. If we love the world that John has described, or anything in it, the love of God is not in us. The love that comes from God will be in direct contrast to worldliness. The world is focused on selfishness and pride, but God’s love is giving and humble.

We must keep ourselves in check, watching to see if love for the world is slipping into our lives. This is a command to refuse to allow that to happen, because it is part of what is passing away. Not only is worldliness destructive, but it is shortsightedly temporal. It is an investment in a doomed venture.

By contrast, investing your life in the will of God, allowing the love of the Father to flow through your life, is an eternal investment. It is a manifestation of eternal life within you. It will reap dividends forever and ever.

Consider: Does this definition of the world describe any part of your life? The love of the Father will counteract that weakness if you will yield to His life in you.

**December 17 Morning**

Jeremiah 29:11-13 *11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart*.

Though the LORD was speaking this to Judah, it is true for all that seek Him. He has good plans for all who would seek Him with their whole heart. Sometimes we have a subconscious idea of God as the big policeman in the sky. He does execute justice, but in doing so He turns us from evil.

He has an intended plan for every life. It is a good and prosperous plan. It is better than we could possibly plan for ourselves. His desire is for our good. If we could grasp that our Creator wants to bless us and be a Father and friend to us, our whole outlook on life would change. That simple understanding would end most depression in the world today. Why do we think He is out to harm us? That is Satan’s goal, not God’s.

When the people of Judah were restored from captivity, they learned a lesson from their punishment. They had a more serious attitude toward God’s instruction.

They made mistakes, but on the whole they were willing to receive instruction.

When our hearts are in that condition, we pray for things that are in line with God’s will for us, and God hears us. We seek His presence and He is there, meeting us as we pray. It must be a wholehearted seeking, because He deserves nothing less.

Prayer: Lord, help me to seek You with all my heart!

**December 17 Evening**

1 John 3:1-3 *1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.*

You can’t see the greatness of this love unless you see how depraved man is in contrast. How holy and good God is! It is only in seeing the contrast that the enormity of love is realized. Have you seen parents that patiently endure the destructive time of experimentation that their teenager goes through? They take care of the child’s every need, love and nurture them through the years and are paid back by rebellion. Now multiply that love to an infinite degree, and multiply the rebellion to the end of your imagination, and you might come somewhere close to understanding how great the love the Father has lavished on us.

He loves us so much that He will see us through until we are transformed into His likeness. The work is in process today, but it will culminate when your eyes behold Him. Then you won’t have to use your imagination any longer. You will see Him as He is. The very sight of Him will transform you. The caterpillar will emerge from his cocoon and spread his wings and fly.

What do we do with this amazing hope? We purify ourselves even as He is pure. We set aside the desires for worldly and things, and focus on cooperating with this transformation. Though we know we will not break free from the cocoon until our eyes behold Him, we allow His daily transforming work to continue.

Meditation: Think about the love the Father has lavished on you, that you should be called a child of God!

**December 18 Morning**

Jeremiah 30:21-22 *21 Their leader will be one of their own; their ruler will arise from among them. I will bring him near and he will come close to me, for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?' declares the LORD. 22 "'So you will be my people, and I will be your God.'"*

“*He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.”* John 1:10 (KJV) In the promises of restoration, there are a number of prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. In this one, the Messiah is prophesied to rise from among them. He would not land in a spaceship or come from another land, neither would He be another type of creation. He would be an Israelite human. But what is it that makes Him different?

God says that the He will draw the Messiah near and He will come close. God draws us all near. The great difference is the Messiah never resisted that drawing of God. He yielded every time and came near. He devoted Himself to be close to His Father. Because of that, the church was born. That is how we became His people. Jesus obedience, even unto death, made a way for us to be the people of God. He made it possible for God to be our God. *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become the sons of God.”* John 1:12 (KJV)

He also made it possible for the promise of the Father to be sent, the Holy Spirit. Now we, too, can draw near to God. But it is our choice! Will we draw close? Will we devote ourselves to be close to Him? How much time will we spend in communion with Him in prayer and the Word? You can see those that do. They are easily distinguishable by their passion and love for God. In a life changing way, God has become their God.

Consider: Will you devote yourself to be close to Him?

**December 18 Evening**

1 John 3:14-16 *14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. 15 Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. 16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*

To John the Beloved, it was just as simple as that. If you are in Jesus, you love your brothers. If you didn’t love your brothers, you have never found life in Christ. Your spirit is still dead. John remembered Jesus’ words from the Sermon on the Mount. Hatred is the equivalent of murder (Matthew 5:21-22). How can you be a murderer and be in life? To be in Christ brings the very life of Christ into your emotions and desires.

Since God is love, Jesus demonstrated the ultimate display of love. He laid down His life for us. Jesus said that was the greatest love a man could display (John 15:13), and then He displayed it for all of us. If the life of Christ is in us, then we will do as Christ did and lay down our lives for our brothers. How can we hold back when our Lord and Master is urging us on with both His example and His presence in us?

John went on to describe ways in which we can demonstrate this love. He wrote of sharing material possessions with our brothers in need. He reminded us that words are not enough. Actions must accompany our caring words, or they are meaningless.

Consider: Have you passed from death to life? Is it manifested in the sharing of your material goods with your brothers in need? In this day and age, we can do that with brothers and sisters around the world through Christian ministries, but don’t forget your own backyard as well.

**December 19 Morning**

Jeremiah 31:31-33 *31 "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. 33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people*.

*“This is the new covenant in my blood,”* Jesus said. (1Corinthians 11:25) He has made the new covenant. It is not based on the blood of animals, but on the blood of the sinless Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. The first covenant is the one made on Mount Sinai. It depended on the obedience to the laws and rules of God. There was no way the people could keep it. God had to become a man and keep it for us. Jesus is the only one to keep the conditions of the old covenant.

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature.”* 2 Corinthians 5:17a(KJV) When we are in Him, the law is in our minds and on our hearts, not the letter that kills, but the Spirit that gives life. We think of the new covenant as a ticket to heaven, but God looks at it as the transformation of our thoughts and desires. Taking on the mind of Christ and sharing in His obedient heart is salvation. It is salvation from sin in this life every moment we live in the Spirit, and it is salvation through eternity to come. Then we resemble the Father, so we are His children. He is indeed our God, the LORD of our lives. We are indeed His people, the sheep of His pasture. The husband relationship is restored, because we are the bride of Christ. We need never fear divorce, for the LORD is our Righteousness. I am my Beloved’s and my Beloved is mine.

Consider: Are you living in the New Covenant with a new heart and mind?

**December 19 Evening**

1 John 4:4-6 *4 You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 5 They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.*

John is teaching us that there are really only two spiritual powers in the world. The greatest spiritual force is that of Christ. The other spirit is against Christ. The spirit of antichrist is the spirit of the world. Those who have that spirit will always speak in accordance with the world’s perspective. The world will readily listen to that perspective. That spirit teaches that God, if He exists, does not care about man. You are on your own to take what you can from the physical world to satisfy your body and soul. You are all that matters. That makes perfect sense to those with a worldly mindset.

The Spirit of Christ in us teaches us to sacrificially love, as Christ did for us. His Spirit teaches us to lay down our lives for others. He teaches us that it is not about us, but it is about the glory of God. That sounds like foolishness to the world, but to those whom God has chosen, it is the music of truth.

Jesus Christ is the great dividing topic of every culture throughout the world. He will be Lord of our lives, or we will insist on being our own god. The Spirit of truth has prevailed and overcome the world in the heart of every believer. He is the Spirit who will reign supreme throughout eternity. Is He reigning in your heart?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, reign in me supremely! Where there is any vestige of the world’s thinking and ways in me, purge it with the truth of your Word. Teach me to love with Your love.

**December 20 Morning**

Jeremiah 33:2-3 *2 "This is what the LORD says, he who made the earth, the LORD who formed it and established it--the LORD is his name: 3 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'*

Are you in turmoil about a situation in your life? Is it hard to understand the reasons and purposes God has for you at present? Does it seem that God has removed His hand from your circumstances? Ask the Creator who formed you. Go to the One who knows all things and has all things in His hands. Listen to His Word as He speaks to you. It declares that He works all things together for good to those who love Him, who are called according to His purposes. (Romans 8:28)

Call out to Him and He will answer. He doesn’t say He might. He doesn’t say when, but He will answer. Our problem is that we cannot see all the factors and events of the future. They are all present before God. They are unsearchable to us, but they are the work of His hand. Your loving Father invites you to ask Him. He will not reveal them to us unless we ask. He will reveal parts of His great plan, and we will see parts of the great puzzle of life fall into place.

His revelation will not always give us complete understanding, but it will give us peace knowing He is on the throne of heaven, ordering all things, and working out all things for our good. He is always at work. Watch for His hand. When things don’t make sense, call out to Him.

Consider: Need His phone number? His direct line is Jeremiah 33:3.

**December 20 Evening**

1 John 4:16,18-19 *16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.*

*God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.*

*18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 19 We love because he first loved us.*

Love is the first in the list of the fruits of the Spirit. It is not that what we so often call love is all that God is. God is not a sentiment or emotion. Love is one of the attributes of God, just one of the fruits of the Spirit, though it is first and foremost. It is like saying, “Bob is friendly.” It doesn’t mean that all friendliness is Bob. The difference is when we see genuinely unselfish love, perfect love, we know that it came from God.

In this perfect love that is a part of the very nature of God, there is no fear. You realize that the One who is over all things will see you through whatever comes into your life. Like a child in the arms of their strong father, we are safe and secure. If trouble should come through the door, Daddy will deal with it. If I have done something wrong, Daddy might discipline me, but never too harshly, for He loves me.

If we fear, we have not discovered the fullness of His love. We are still anxious about what He will bring our way. We wonder if He won’t get fed up with us and send us away. But when we see the extent of His love, we will never fear these things. That is where we find peace in the midst of a storm. The more we see that unconditional love, the more we love Him in return. Love begets love. You can’t help but love someone who loves you so unconditionally.

Consider: If you want to love Him more, dwell on the extent of His love for you.

**December 21 Morning**

Lamentaions 3:22-24 *22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. 23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 24 I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."*

The book of Lamentations is Jeremiah’s woeful song about the destruction of Jerusalem. What once was the joy of the whole earth became a smoldering pile of ruin. The roads would no longer be full of joyful pilgrims heading to the appointed feasts of the LORD. The priests would no longer offer the daily sacrifices. Their world had come to an end because of their insistence on idolatry. Even the remnant that remained rejected the warning of Jeremiah and went to Egypt where they offered incense and baked cakes to the Queen of Heaven. They insisted the problem was that they had forsaken her, not the Lord. Most scholars believe the remnant finally killed Jeremiah in Egypt for constantly warning them about impending judgment.

In the midst of Jeremiah’s song of woe, he reminds us that even though all seems lost, it is only because of the LORD’S great love that we are not consumed. The creatures are rebelling and insulting the One who made them and who carefully laid out guidelines for their good. It is amazing that He doesn’t instantly vaporize them, but His compassions never fail. Every morning His compassion is renewed, hoping that we will turn back and restore our relationship with Him. Could there be a more faithful God? Why would we turn to any other?

Jeremiah declared that His portion, his inheritance, his appointed part in life, was the LORD. He wasn’t looking for wealth or power or fame. He just wanted the LORD. Therefore, he determined to wait in expectation (hope) on Him. He wasn’t looking for anything in this life as a goal. The LORD was his goal.

Consider: What is your goal in life?

**December 21 Evening**

1 John 5:14-15 *14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him.*

Jesus tells us to ask, and promises we will receive (Matthew 7:7). He also said that if we asked anything in His name, He would do it. John captures the essence of asking in His name by saying that we must ask according to His will. To ask in His name is to ask with His authority. That which is in His will has His authority. The Spirit led person prays the will of God into the earth. His heart is united with the heart of the Father. His desires are one with the Father’s. David said that if we delight ourselves in God, He gives us the desires of our heart (Psalm 37:4). Because God is our delight, our desires come in line with His.

When we know our prayer is His will, we have perfect confidence that He will bring it to pass in His time. We pray with extraordinary faith. John is specifically referring to praying for a person who has stumbled. We pray for conviction first and then for their repentance and restoration.

From the emphasis of this letter, we might draw the conclusion that there was a great deal of strife within the church. People must have been at odds with one another. That is probably why he emphasized that we cannot hate a brother if we are in Christ. We must love, because God is love. Here is a key to changing our heart attitude. Pray for that person. Realize sin is the deceptive destroyer that is blinding their eyes. Let your animosity and blame be toward the sin and not the one caught in sin’s trap. It will change your attitude and help you find God’s heart for others. You will be praying according to God’s will, and you can know your prayers will be answered.

Consider: How does God want me to pray for the person I’m upset with? What is God’s heart for that person?

**December 22 Morning**

Ezekiel 3:17-19 *17 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. 18 When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. 19 But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself.*

Ezekiel was called to be a prophet to the people of Judah in exile in Babylon.

His calling is similar to that of the prophet Isaiah. He saw a vision of the glory of God several times. He described the same beings that fly about the throne and gave a little more detail than Isaiah did. The descriptions are fascinating. You can read them in the first three chapters of Ezekiel. Try reading it in several translations. We will all see the same thing one day, for we will all stand before the Judgment Seat of God.

Over and over God told Ezekiel that the people would not listen, but that was not to be his concern. He had to tell them anyway. God even told him that if he was sent as a missionary, those people would listen, but not this stubborn people of Judah. Some pastors wonder if they have the same calling. Our ministry is not about numbers. It is about obedience to God! There will be those that do hear, even if the vast majority does not. All are given a chance to hear and are then accountable to God with what they did with what they heard.

In our passage today, God gave Ezekiel an extra incentive to speak out what God had spoken to him. If we do not speak when God tells us to, we are the ones accountable to God for the blood of the wicked. It is obedience to God for that man to obey what he hears, as it is obedience to God for us to speak the words He commands us to speak.

Prayer: Lord, help us to be faithful to speak what You command us to speak.

**December 22 Evening**

Jude 1:3-4 *3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. 4 For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.*

Jude is a one-chapter letter of warning. Jesus had given the church the mission of spreading the Gospel to the world. As it began to do so, Satan counterattacked from several different angles. He brought about physical persecution. This only seemed to strengthen the conviction of believers. The deaths of martyrs inspired others to give their lives to Christ. The other attack came from within. Prominent men gained positions of authority in the church, but they did not continue teaching the apostles doctrine. By flattery and deception they influenced some in the church to hear their deceptive schemes.

This attack continues to this day. It is not always easy to spot because of the subtlety of these men. There is nearly always some form of immorality or financial gain involved. Paul, Peter and John also warned the churches about these deceivers. It is not that they deny who Jesus is, for that would be too obvious. They deny His lordship over their lives. The fruit of their lives gives them away. They draw people to themselves and not the Lord Jesus Christ. If you were to hear them speak, you would come away thinking of the man and not Jesus Christ. Jude is telling us that we must contend for the faith. Stand up to these deceivers. Expose them. Point out where they err from Scripture. Do not fear them. Point people back to Jesus.

Consider: Credentials and positions are not a guarantee of the lordship of Christ in that leader. By their fruits you will know them (Matthew 7:20).

**December 23 Morning**

Ezekiel 11:19-20 *19 I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. 20 Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.*

Ezekiel saw another vision of God. The predictions of doom were so dark that he cried out asking if any would survive. The LORD said that He was the sanctuary of those already in exile. There were two separate times in which Babylon came and took people into captivity. This prophesy came in between those times.

Then the LORD gave him one of the first promises of restoration in the book of Ezekiel. God promised to give them an undivided heart and a new spirit. God had just shown Ezekiel how corrupt their hearts had become. This was the only hope for them in the future, a new spirit. Their main problem was that their hearts were divided between Jehovah and other gods. The only way that can be dealt with is to have a new heart. The heart they had then was too hard. They did not have the tenderness of God’s heart toward them. If we could but see how tender and patient God’s heart is toward us, it would help to give us an undivided heart.

The new heart is that of the new creation birthed in us when we come to Jesus asking for life. He takes out our old stony heart and gives us a heart of flesh. Then, in tenderness toward His Spirit within us, we live the Spirit behind the Law. We become His children and can call Him our God. Is your heart tender toward His Spirit? Is it divided between Him and the world, like Judah of old? If you recognize it is, ask for revelation of His tender heart toward you. Ask for that miraculous work of a spiritual heart transplant.

Meditation: God longs for your heart to be undivided.

**December 23 Evening**

Revelation 1:16-18 *16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. 17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*

According to early church records, the Romans attempted to boil John in oil. It just didn’t seem to bother him, so they exiled him to an island. There he saw a vision of the Christ in all His glory. The last time John saw Jesus was at His ascension. The last time John saw Jesus in glory was on the Mount of Transfiguration. Now, from the right hand of the throne of God, Jesus, in all His glory, reveals Himself to John.

John’s reaction is the same as those in Scripture who have a revelation of glory. He falls on his face stunned and weakened. The Lord identifies Himself with His familiar expression used throughout Scripture, *“Do not be afraid.”* He says He is the first (alpha) and the last (omega), the Living One. He was dead and is alive forever and ever! He holds the keys of death and Hades, which were taken in His conquest of Satan.

This is the same glorious Christ our eyes will see when we pass from this life. There is no need to fear. He is the Victor over death and hell. He is the alive forever, and has prepared the way for our reception into the presence of God. He has something to say to us, and that is why He has appeared to John. There are things in our individual and corporate lives that please Him, and some things that displease Him. The Spirit is still speaking to the churches. You don’t need a revelation like this. Just open your Bible and your heart, and hear what He has to say to you.

Consider: The sword from His mouth encourages and convicts. What am I in need of hearing today?

**December 24 Morning**

Ezekiel 33:31-32 *31 My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. 32 Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.*

They were going through the motions of worship without letting it transform their hearts. It wasn’t that they didn’t attend. It wasn’t that they deleted the Word from their worship. It was a matter of the heart’s desire. They had ears, but they did not hear with their hearts. There is even more condemnation toward those who sit and hear the Word read, yet go out without letting the Word change their hearts. They know they are acting in opposition to the Word. They know what God expects and yet are refusing to have anything to do with His right to lordship over their lives.

They are likened to those watching a performance. God has a lovely voice. He plays His love song so beautifully. “What a great performance! Now let’s go home and go on about our lives.” We choose to forget how intensely personal His song of love is. We refuse to allow it to penetrate our hearts, for there it would create a love that demands a response. We would lose some of the control of our life. We would surrender some of our decisions to the One we love. What an honor to be loved by Him, yet how lightly we take it.

The next time you enter into a place of worship, whether it is a Bible study or a church service, consider this passage. Take a moment to bookmark it right now to remind you. Corporate worship is not a performance. It is about your Creator’s intensely passionate love for you.

Consider: Will you respond by hearing the Word with your heart, so that you put His Word into practice?

**December 24 Evening**

Revelation 2:3-5 *3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*

Jesus dictated seven letters to churches in Asia Minor. Each is addressed to the angel of that church. Elders oversaw the early churches. The elder that was to speak that week was sometimes referred to as the angel (messenger). The messenger for that week was to deliver Jesus’ message. That is the way it should be every week.

This passage was written to the church in Ephesus. It was the church that John would oversee when released from exile. Jesus commends them, and then gives them some instructive discipline. They had endured hardships without growing weary. That says a lot! What is our normal reaction to hardships? The flesh wants to run away, and if we can’t, we complain and grow weary. This wasn’t true of the persevering church in Ephesus.

They did the outward correctly, but there was something wrong in their hearts. They had left that love they first had when they were saved. When they were first redeemed, they had a revelation of God’s love that captivated their hearts. Now those fires were only embers. Oh, they are still serving and worshipping faithfully, even in the face of difficulty, but something is wrong in their hearts.

Jesus is after our heart above all else. Service is just an overflow of the heart. They may be enduring now, but if their hearts continue to cool, they will no longer persevere. It is true for every Christian and every church. Have you fallen from a great height?

Consider: Is your love for Jesus stronger than it has ever been, or do you remember a time when…? Turn!

**December 25 Morning**

Ezekiel 37:3-5 *3 He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know." 4 Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! 5 This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life*.

Ezekiel was prophesying to the people of Israel who did not have the life of God in them. They went into captivity a depraved people that were a horrible example of people in covenant with the one true God. What is needed to change our testimonies from disgrace to honoring the name we bear? What can bring life to our lifeless existence? Only the Spirit of God can make the difference.

The Word of God must be heard. “Breath” is the same in Hebrew as “wind” or “spirit”. The Spirit of God must be breathed into us. Do you remember that it was the breath of God that brought life to Adam (Genesis 2:7)? And do you remember that Jesus breathed upon His disciples and told them to receive the Spirit (John 20:22)?

In this passage God is dealing with His people Israel. It is by His command that the breath of God brings life. In the New Testament we are told that the Father longs to give the Holy Spirit to those who will but ask (Luke 11:13). If you recognize your life is lifeless, that it needs a power beyond yourself, if you need to be restored from scattered bones to a living breathing being, ask the Father. He longs to give good things to His children when they will but ask.

Consider: Will you receive the breath of God today!

**December 25 Evening**

Revelation 3:15-16, 20 *15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm-neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*

*20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*

Jesus dictated the last letter to John for the church of Laodicea. Though these were actual churches in Asia Minor, some believe that these represent different periods of church history, Laodicea being the last and one that we are currently in.

The indictment against them was that they were content in their physical abundance. They were not on fire with desire to love and serve God, neither were they anti-God. They were just apathetic. The opposite of love is not hate; it is apathy. They thought they had this world’s goods and the promise of heaven too.

Jesus told them that they did not realize that they were really naked and blind and poor. Contentment in this world had numbed them to their true spiritual condition.

Jesus gave them the solution. Come to Him and buy true wealth, righteous clothing, and eye medicine so they could see. He asks them to answer the door. He’s knocking but they are too busy with the things of the world. If we will just get up and let Him in, everything would change. But maybe we are too comfortable to get up. As a guest, His words may disturb us too much. We may see our true condition and realize there must be a change, so we leave Him outside. He longs to sit and eat with us in sweet fellowship. It would heal us of our lukewarm spirit. Will you get up and let Him in right now? Then, take the time to dine with Him and hear what He would say to you.

Consider: He’s knocking. How will you respond?

**December 26 Morning**

Ezekiel 47:1,9,12 *1The man brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar.*

*9 Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live.*

*12 Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing."*

There are two popular interpretations for this passage. In the coming Kingdom of God upon the earth, there will literally be a river that springs up from under the threshold of the temple We could say that the course of this river, defined so clearly in this passage, is an indication of its literal fulfillment. What a change that would make to Israel! The Jordan today is a muddy little creek. The Dead Sea level drops every year. The people were always dependent upon God bringing the rain early and late in the year. It was a part of the Jews struggle, deciding between Jehovah and Baal. Baal was said to be the god of rain. Their survival depended on rain. In this coming day, there will be an abundance of provision. This is extraordinary water! It brings life wherever it goes. Trees on those shores bear fruit every month. Fisherman cast nets in it and harvest an abundance of fish. The Dead Sea will no longer be salt water. In that day, there will no longer be a struggle for provision for the people of God. There will be abundance.

We could also look at this passage in a figurative sense. Jesus is the chief cornerstone of the temple of living stones. Out from Him flows the Living Water. He told the woman at the well that she should ask Him for this amazing water. Wherever the water goes it does bring life! It brought life to her. It brought life to her village. Jesus probably took the route described in our verse for today from Jerusalem to Jericho many times. Remember the man that was healed with the mud made from spit? He first said that he saw men walking as trees (Mark 8:24). Those who drink of the River of Life do bear fruit on a regular basis, because the water of the sanctuary flows to them. Their leaves are for the healing of the nations. What a description of lifestyle evangelism!

Consider: If you are a fruit tree, what is your fruit?

**December 26 Evening**

Revelation 2:7 and portions of 11,17,26,28,3:5,12,21 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God…will not be hurt at all by the second death... I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name* *written on it, known only to him who receives it…I will give authority over the nations-- I will also give him the morning star…be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels…I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name…I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.*

These promises come at the end of the various letters to the churches of Asia Minor. They are made to those who overcome the compromises Jesus outlined in the letters. Most of the churches had areas of weakness or compromise that needed to change, just as each of us has.

If Jesus were to write you a letter, what compromises would He point out? He encourages you to overcome, and promises that if you do, you will receive the above promises to overcomers.

Meditation: Would you take a moment to let the Holy Spirit search your heart and point out the areas that need to change? Then, go back and read the promises to those who overcome. It may seems that it would not be worth the effort or the cost to make those changes, but when you read the promises, you will find it is more than worth any cost. Don’t be anything less than an overcomer!

**December 27 Morning**

Daniel 1:7-8 *7 The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego. 8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.*

Daniel was one of the young men from the court of the king of Judah who was taken to be re-educated to serve as a eunuch for the king of Babylon. Daniel served the kings of Babylon and Medo-Persia as a government official until the return of the Jews, seventy years later.

One of the first things Babylon did was to try to change the identity of these men. Daniel means “God is judge,” but his new name means ‘Bel will protect’.

Hananiah means “the LORD is gracious,” but his new name is “inspired of Aku.”

Azariah means “the LORD is my help’, but his new name is “servant of Nego.” Mishael means ‘who is like God,” but his new name is “belonging to Aku.” These incredible Hebrew names were changed to the names of idols! That is exactly what the world wants to do to you. A name meant the identity of the person, their destiny and heritage. It was a part of the program of Babylon to cause the youth to forsake their culture and beliefs and adopt those of Babylon.

Who are you in Christ? What is the name He has given you? Converts of the first century changed their names upon conversion to match with their new identity. In heaven, the overcomers will receive a white stone upon which is written their new name, an identity in God. Babylon was doing just the opposite. Can you see how the world would like to change your identity to that of one who belongs among them?

Consider: You will influence your world, or your world will influence you.

Maintain your identity in Christ with firm resolve.

**December 27 Evening**

Revelation 5:4-6 *4 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. 5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." 6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*

John is caught up into heaven to witness an event that takes place in the timelessness of eternity. I can’t tell you if it happened at the ascension or will happen at the end of this age or even if it is related to time as we know it. The important thing is that God has a scroll that unleashes the events that preclude the Day of the Lord. Someone had to be worthy to approach God and receive the scroll and open the seals. No man has ever been holy enough to approach God, with the exception of Jesus.

Why would John weep? Without the Day of the Lord, this world would go on in its fallen state with suffering and death. Only when a perfect Savior and conqueror of sin and death approached the throne could the events begin to unfold.

He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, and the Lamb of God. He looked as if he had been slain, or as one translator put it, “with the marks that caused His death.” When we meet Jesus in the clouds we will see the same marks.

They are there eternally as receipt of our redemption.

We are grateful for our salvation that was purchased by the death process that inflicted those scars, but we should also consider in gratitude the fact that His victory will one day set this earth free from the curse it is under. Suffering will cease. Death will be no more. It is no wonder that heaven is filled with praise to God and the Lamb.

Consider the marks that caused His death and all that they should mean to you.

**December 28 Morning**

Daniel 2:44-45 *44 "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. 45 This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands--a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. "The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy."*

Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon when Daniel went into captivity. Daniel had been through their re-education program to serve the king as a man of wisdom and counsel. This group of people also practiced magical arts, but Daniel and his friends continued to seek the one true God alone.

When Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that troubled him, he called for this group of counselors to interpret the dream. Apparently, he was wise to their trickery and really wanted to know the truth about this dream. He asked them to first tell him what he had dreamed. Then he would know that they had special wisdom from the gods. When they could not help him, he ordered their execution.

Daniel asked his friends to pray for a revelation from God. Daniel was given the interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar dreamt of a great statue. Its head was of gold, arms and chest of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and the legs, feet and toes were part iron and part clay. A rock was cut out of a mountain and flew into the image, breaking it in pieces. These metals and parts of the image were symbolic of coming kingdoms. Each metal was the main metal used by one of the coming kingdoms. The rock is the Kingdom of God. When the world of man’s governments comes down to the final ten nations, the toes, Christ will return and set up the Kingdom of God. Man’s governments will end.

Consider: The eternal Kingdom of Christ is coming. Considering that this is the destiny of this world, how should we live today?

**December 28 Evening**

Revelation 12:10-12 *10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. 11 They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. 12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."*

After a battle in heaven, the devil and the angels that followed him are cast out. With the heavenly battle won, a loud voice announces the coming of salvation and power and the kingdom of God and the authority of His Christ. It is not that the devil is finished. In fact, then he will really go to work in the earth. But for all intents and purposes, he’s done. Without access to heaven, he has no real power to continue.

The devil is called “the accuser of our brothers.” He lives out the picture we see in the first chapters of Job (Job 1:9-11). He is always making accusations as to our integrity and the motivations of our hearts. That is the source of some of our guilt and doubt. Once he is cast out of heaven, he can’t continue that practice.

How are we to overcome such an incredible being? We overcome with the blood of the Lamb. It is the purchase of our redemption. When he accuses us, we point to the blood shed for us and remind him that we have the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21). We overcome with our testimony. No one can deny our experience. We have seen our lives transformed. We know it is a work of the Holy Spirit in us. But finally, we overcome by not clinging to our lives. Death is our graduation. When the Destroyer takes our physical life, he can do no more. We win.

Consider: Are you overcoming with the blood of the Lamb, the word of your testimony, and by not clinging to your life here?

**December 29 Morning**

Daniel 3:17-18, 25 *17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."…*

*25 He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."*

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream went to his head. That was a pun. He was represented by the head of gold on a 90-foot high statue. When his instrumentalists played, everyone had to bow and worship the image. Some people think this is a foreshadowing of the image of the Antichrist will one day set up.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down, because they worshiped Jehovah alone. The king gave them a second chance. No doubt, he had heard of their faithful service and promotions Daniel had given them and knew the other officials were envious.

They told the king plainly, “Our God can save us, but if He does not, we still won’t worship the image.” Consider those words. God can work a miracle if He chooses. If He does not choose to, it shouldn’t change our minds. What is right is right, regardless if God intervenes or if we suffer. Sometimes we insist that God work on our behalf. Do we have the conviction that if He chooses not to, that He knows what is best, even if we lose our business, loved one, or even our life? He is able! But we don’t always know beforehand what He will do. Will we do what is right regardless of what God determines is best?

The furnace was heated seven times hotter than normal. The guards who threw them in were killed from the heat. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were walking in the fire unharmed. The king saw a fourth man in the fire who appeared to be like a son of the gods. They came out without even the smell of smoke.

Meditation: Our God can deliver us, but if not, do what is right!

**December 29 Evening**

Revelation 19:6-8 *6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!*

*For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)*

When the systems and governments of man have been judged and are no more, then the Lord God Almighty will reign over mankind. When that happens, there will be a mighty shout in the heavens, *"Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.”* Praise be to God! The injustices and prejudices of man will cease. It is something we can really rejoice over. God has patiently let us try to run things for millenniums, but we have only shown what a mess we can make. Give Him glory for ending our ways and our methods and finally establishing His righteous reign.

But there is another reason to lift up a shout of praise. The people of God, who are the bride of Christ, has made herself ready for her marriage to the Lamb. There is that dual work we see throughout Scripture. She has made herself ready. Yet, to her is given a robe of righteousness. Well, which is it? Was it her efforts to follow and submit to the Lordship of Christ, or the robe given her? The robe is her righteous acts, yet it is given her. He prepared in advance good works for us to do.

(Ephesians 2:10)

Rejoice and give Him glory. He is working through you to prepare you for the marriage. He will clothe you in bright, clean, and fine linen. The work He is doing in you will be completed, and you will forever be with the Lord. No death will ever part you two. You may kiss the Son. (Psalms 2:12)

Meditation: The story ends with a marriage to the coming King. Are you getting ready for that day?

**December 30 Morning**

Daniel 7:21-22, 27 *21 As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, 22 until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.*

*27 Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.'*

Daniel has given us many prophecies relating to the end-times. Just as Nebuchadnezzar’s image ended with ten toes, the beasts of Daniel’s vision end with ten horns. A horn is a symbol of power. A little horn rises up and plucks up three of the ten horns. This is the Antichrist. He makes war with the saints for three and a half years (time, times, and half a time). The revelation of Jesus to John gives the same scenario. The saints throughout the world will be tortured and killed because they will not bow to the Antichrist and refuse to worship him. His freedom to do this is limited to a set amount of time.

When that time is up, the Ancient of Days (God) will come and pronounce judgment in favor of the saints. Then they will possess the kingdom. We are already in the Kingdom of God if we are in Christ. We already have the blessings of that kingdom in our hearts. The prophecy is speaking of the kingdoms of the world, as verse 27 makes so clear. Rule, power, and greatness will be given to God’s people. Yet, it is still called His kingdom. That is because we are His. Just as we co-labor with Him now, we will co-labor with Him then.

Consider: This world is our training ground for learning to work with God. How are you doing? Remember the parable in which Jesus told the steward who was faithful with a certain amount of money that he was now to rule over a certain number of cities? (Luke 19) Be faithful to serve Him now and you will be prepared to serve Him as ruler over cities then.

**December 30 Evening**

Revelation 22:3-5 *3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.*

The city is the bride of the Lamb. It comes down out of heaven to the earth adorned as a bride at a wedding. The curse that came upon the world because of sin has been lifted. The world will be a Garden of Eden.

The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in us, the city. The authority and dominion over the earth will be restored to the descendants of the one who gave up that authority.

And what will we do? His servants will serve Him. Though we are given authority, we rule as His servants. It is what we should be doing now, serving Christ our King. Sin so often interferes and corrupts our service, but then it will be a pure and holy service.

We will see His face! Our glorified bodies will be able to look into His eyes. His name will be on our foreheads. Romans sometimes branded the name of the master upon the forehead of a lifelong slave. When you saw him in the market place you knew who he served. The more important the master, the more you heeded the servant’s business. We will have the most important name of all upon our foreheads.

Darkness will be a thing of the past for us. The Lord who reigns within us will radiate light. All will be illuminated for us. Our eternal reign will have begun.

Consider: This is the destiny of those who are the bride of Christ. A betrothed girl waits anxiously for the day her husband will come and take her as his own. Is this the daily expectation of your heart?

**December 31 Morning**

Daniel 9:2-3, 19 *2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. 3 So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. 19 O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name."*

The prophet Daniel was reading the prophecies of Jeremiah and discovered that it was time for the captivity to be over. He didn’t run out and tell everyone to pack their bags. In his heart, he knew the people were not spiritually ready, so he interceded for them in prayer. He discerned the need for repentance before they returned and ended up making the same mistakes. He was very earnest in his intercession, even fasting and donning sackcloth and ashes.

What a heart this man of God had for the people of God! But even more than that, he had a heart after God. He closes his prayer by asking because the people and city bear the Name of Jehovah. He was concerned about the reputation of the name of the Lord in the world. Have you ever prayed for the church you attend with that in mind? “God help us because we are a poor example of Christ. We need forgiveness and restoration because we are called Christians.” It is a new perspective for many of us. We pray for all kinds of reasons, but rarely out of concern for the name of the LORD. May the LORD help us all to be a testimony of the great name of God in all we do and say.

The angel Gabriel came to speak to Daniel about his prayer. Gabriel told Daniel that he is highly esteemed. He is a Hall of Fame person in heaven. Tomorrow’s evening devotion (January 1) is on the incredible word the angel brought to Daniel in regards to forgiveness and restoration.

Consider: May we all prefer the honor of heaven over the honor of man.

**December 31 Evening**

Revelation 22:12, 17 *12 "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.*

*17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.*

You have come to end of Through the Bible Daily Devotional. Be sure and read the whole story, the Bible. It is a story upon which all other stories are based. Jesus is the superhero of all superheroes. He is King that was separated from His kingdom but returned to set things right. He is the one who conquers the dark power of evil. He is the handsome Prince that has come to rescue His damsel in distress, but He is greater than every story that imitates this true story. We could not imagine a more wonderful King, Groom, and Friend.

It is such a wonderful story that at times we wonder if it is really all true. Will it really turn out this way? Is He really coming soon with our reward? Then the assurance of the Spirit that He has deposited within us says, *“Yes! I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. Not one small mark will fail until ALL is fulfilled. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”*

Listen! The Spirit within you says, “Come!” When you think of the lifting of the curse, the reward that awaits you, and of being forever in His presence, you say “Come!” Everyone that reads the Book or hears the story says, “Come!” Every thirsty soul that wishes may come and drink freely the gift of the water of life.

Meditation: He is coming soon, and His reward is with Him, and He will give to each person according to what he or she has done.

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1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
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4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)