

OLD TESTAMENT



# EVERY SINGLE DAY

*Daily Bible Reading Plan for West Virginia*

WV CONVENTION *of* SOUTHERN BAPTISTS

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*Strengthening and sending  
churches to make Jesus known  
in and through West Virginia*



# FORWARD

## *Every Single Day*



According to a recent report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, West Virginia has the highest rate of drug overdose death in the country. Collectively, West Virginia Southern Baptist pastors are greatly concerned about this drug culture that has darkened our state and permeated our society.

In his study of Acts 19, and understanding the connection between sorcery and drug use, one WVCSB pastor discovered how Paul responded to the problem in Ephesus. Paul taught the Bible daily for 2 years in the hall of Tyrannus.

We're challenging our convention of churches to do the same.

What would happen in West Virginia if churches led their people to read God's word *every single day*, and we raised up and sent out Bible-loving, Bible-knowing people to be government leaders, business leaders, and culture creators? Wouldn't that radically transform our state?

To facilitate this initiative, we're providing two devotional guides - the Old Testament in 2017 and the New Testament in 2018.

Join us on this journey to be people who are not only saturated with Scripture, but people who intercede daily and earnestly on behalf of West Virginia, our country, and our world.

**- West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists**



# JANUARY 1

*Genesis 1:1*



**I**N THE BEGINNING, GOD CREATED THE HEAVENS  
AND THE EARTH.”

With this short sentence, the author of Genesis not only introduces the reader to the creation narrative, but also the main subject and hero of the story that will unfold. For thirty-nine Old Testament books and twenty-seven New Testament books, author after author will seek to express the glory, power, authority, grace and mercy of this one supreme being, God.

It is important as you read the Scriptures this year that you remember what this book is ultimately about. It is not a story about you, it is a story about God. Over forty human authors will pen this grand narrative from Genesis to Revelation. From Moses to the apostle John, they will write in ancient languages covering thousands of years of history. They will tell stories of God’s people, write songs and poetry, foretell future events, and teach and exhort God’s people. These sixty-six individual books will make up one diverse and complex book that ultimately unfolds the story of our God.

As Christians, we embrace the truth of inspiration, that God is the ultimate supernatural author of this unified story. So, as you begin your journey in reading this year, do so with an understanding that God is telling you a story about God, he is expressing to you his glory and supremacy over all things. He is going to walk you through history and demonstrate to you his grace and mercy toward sinners, his justice and judgment toward the wicked, his patience and longsuffering toward his children. Over and over these diverse stories have one subject in mind, God. As you pick up the Scriptures on a daily basis this year, remind yourself that God is speaking to you.

# JANUARY 2

## *Genesis 1-2*



**T**HE CREATION STORY IS TOLD SO THAT WE MIGHT BE INTRODUCED TO THE CREATOR. IT IS HERE THE AUTHOR SETS THE TONE, NOT ONLY FOR GENESIS, BUT FOR THE REST OF THE SCRIPTURES.

In these first two chapters we learn that God is pre-existent. At the beginning of all of creation, God already existed. The author assumes we recognize this truth. This divine being has no beginning, no end, and nothing caused him to exist and nothing sustains his existence outside of himself. From the very first verse we learn that this being is infinitely different from us. Remember that as you read and worship!

We also learn that God is an immensely powerful being. Unlike anything creation has to offer, God possesses the power to create something from nothing. He speaks and planets spring into existence. His power is overwhelming, captures our attention, and it distances itself from anything we know. By spoken word, this complex, interdependent world begins. He simply spoke.

We learn that God is creative. With his canvas in hand he paints a beautiful picture that is elaborate and stunning. He creates a solar system of planets and stars that are diverse in color and function. He creates an amazing diversity of plants and animals. Many created for the specific reason to sustain the pinnacle of his creation, man. Some simply to display his creativity and infinite imagination.

And let us remember, all that God did in these six days had one primary design, to display his glory and draw all praise to himself. Walk outside after you read today and look around in wonder. Let creation do its intended work in your heart as you lift up your soul in praise to the Creator!



# JANUARY 3

*Genesis 1:26*



**N**OT ALL CREATION IS CREATED EQUAL. THE STRUCTURE OF THE GENESIS NARRATIVE PLACES MANKIND ABOVE ALL ELSE AS THE APEX OF GOD'S CREATION.

No other part of creation deserves a place beside man, but under man. Why? One simple reason. Moses records for us in Genesis 1:26-27, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'"

God's creation of human beings, male and female, is unique in his creative design. To no other part of his creation will he assign the "image of God." Every man and every woman ever born has this unique imprint upon them. What does this mean? At a minimum we recognize that mankind, and only mankind, possesses a unique value and dignity unlike all of the rest of creation.

This text is important for Christians and how we view the world, our fellow man, and why we value every human life. There are no exceptions since every human being is created in the image of God. This truth demands we fight against abortion and seek to preserve the life of every unborn child. This is why we seek to meet the needs of our fellow man, those who are suffering and in desperate need. This is why we despise racism and bigotry, recognizing all are created equal. Every human being is created in the image of God and is to be valued. We cannot say this enough.

As you consider this truth, take time and pray for the many churches, pregnancy care centers, and law enforcement officials today as they fight to protect life.

# JANUARY 4

## *Genesis 3*



**A**N ADVERSARY WALKS INTO HISTORY AND SEEKS TO DESTROY ALL THAT IS GOOD IN GENESIS 3. HE IS A SERPENT, A DECEIVER, THE FATHER OF LIES, AND THE ENEMY OF GOD. HE WILL SEEK TO TWIST GOD'S WORD IN THE MIND OF GOD'S CHILDREN. HE WILL CHALLENGE GOD'S AUTHORITY AND SEEK TO UNDERMINE HIS PURPOSES.

When Genesis 2 ended, Adam and Eve were not ashamed - they stood in the garden in relationship with their Creator. However, everything changed. By partaking in the fruit, they recognized their nakedness and they now stood before their Creator ashamed. Adam and Eve's disobedience sends creation into a tailspin.

Genesis 3 is central to the rest of the Bible. If Genesis 3 is missed, the rest of the Bible will simply not make sense. The Scriptures will draw a line directly to this chapter as all of our failure, disobedience and shame are traced back to this event and to this one man. The apostle Paul will affirm Adam's responsibility with explicit statements such as: "many died through one man's trespass ... judgment following one trespass brought condemnation ... because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man ... one trespass led to condemnation for all men... by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (Romans 5:15-19). All of creation would be sent into a state of despair and fallenness.

If it were not for one verse in this chapter, Genesis 3:15, we would walk away from this account hopeless. But God would send another man, a God-man, one who would not fail, and one who would fulfill the law and obey the Father in every manner. This man, Jesus, would not bring death, he would bring life!

# JANUARY 5

*Genesis 3:15*



**T**HIS IS NOT *a* STORYLINE, IT IS *the* STORY OF ALL OF SCRIPTURE.

In the midst of his judgment upon Satan, God promises a deliverer. He says to the deceiver, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

Victory would be God’s. The serpent would ultimately be defeated. And, as we later learn, his defeat is our victory. The seed of the woman, Jesus Christ, would deliver God’s people. He would not allow mankind to eternally groan and suffer forever under judgment. Instead, he would provide a redeemer, a deliverer, who would free the people of God from the tyranny of Satan, sin, and death. This is why Paul could taunt death in 1 Corinthians 15, “O death, where is your victory? O death where is your sting? [God] gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The text speaks to the very core of who God is. Yes, he is justice, holiness and wrath. He must punish sin, he must judge wickedness. But God is also a God of grace and mercy. It is part of who he is to deliver and display love toward the undeserving. So, once we understand this about God we are not surprised in Genesis 3, when in the midst of sin and disobedience, he promises to deliver.

As you read the Old Testament this year do not fall into the trap of thinking the Old Testament shows a vengeful God while the New Testament declares a loving God. That is not true and undermines the glory of God. From the outset of disobedience God declares salvation and grace. The Old Testament is full of God showing mercy and patience. Look for it as you read. You may be surprised how much grace you see in the Old Testament!

# JANUARY 6

## *Genesis 4*



**S**IN HAS SO MANY CONSEQUENCES AND DAMAGING EFFECTS. THE AUTHORS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT DO NOT HIDE THESE UGLY REALITIES OR COVER UP THE EMBARRASSING ACCOUNTS.

Throughout the Old Testament we read breathtaking stories of sin - the sad fruits of the fall. Evil will rear its ugly head repeatedly and the serpent will seemingly get the upper hand at times.

After being driven from the garden the first family is torn apart by jealousy, hatred, and wickedness. Cain is consumed with his own ways, his own righteousness. Abel seeks God's ways and God's righteousness. Cain burns with hate and anger toward God. Abel is devoted to that which is pleasing to God.

The apostle John will use this tragic episode to urge the Christians, who have been transformed by grace, to love one another. I find it surprising he turns to this story to teach us a lesson. John says, "For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:11-12a, 14-15).

Sin has brought forth immeasurably harmful consequences, but John reminds us that God's grace in Christ can overcome evil and bring forth fruits of righteousness in our lives. If not for God's grace we too would be like Cain, full of envy, strife, and hatred. God transforms his children. He places his Spirit in us and empowers us to love one another.

# JANUARY 7

*Genesis 4-5, 10-11*



**G**ENEALOGIES ARE HARD TO READ, AND AS A RESULT, WE ARE OFTEN TEMPTED TO SKIP OVER THEM IN OUR YEARLY BIBLE READING PROGRAMS.

In Genesis we find the author tracking several lines of families. If we are honest, we don't find these lengthy lists important. Most of us only recognize and value a few generations in our own families, much less families that lived thousands of years ago.

Let me encourage you with five reminders as you read through various accounts of lineage in the Scriptures.

**1. God's providence:** Watch how he patiently raises up generation after generation of men and women to advance his purposes. Many genealogies are demonstrations of God's faithful providence.

**2. God's Grace:** You may be caught thinking, "God used him or her?" God's grace is extensive as he uses sinners to accomplish his cause. He is using you for his purpose, right?

**3. See the narrative advance:** My guess is if these texts weren't important they would have been left out. See what the author is trying to communicate and why he has placed it in that particular section.

**4. Life is a vapor:** Walk through the graveyard of men and women who have lived and died. No one escapes this harsh reality. Let this be a good exhortation to be faithful in the time we have.

**5. Not one of the people named is the ultimate seed of Eve who will conquer:** Individual after individual will rise up and yet none are capable of fully and finally delivering God's people from the tyranny of Satan, sin and death. But, don't be disappointed! There are some genealogies awaiting us in the New Testament that will take us to that Deliverer, Jesus.

# JANUARY 8

*Genesis 6-9*



**T**HE LORD SAW THAT THE WICKEDNESS OF MAN WAS GREAT IN THE EARTH, AND THAT EVERY INTENTION OF THE THOUGHTS OF HIS HEART WAS ONLY EVIL CONTINUALLY.”

Genesis 6:5 gives us the sad testimony of Noah’s day. The earth had become corrupt, sin had seemingly won the day, and God now stands in judgment over all of creation. The Creator is grieved and angry. Creation is in rebellion and destruction is at hand. And in the midst of it all we find grace.

“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.” In Genesis 6 we hear echoes of Ephesians 2. Like the generations of Noah, we too were in rebellion against our Creator. We were “dead in our trespasses and sins,” we walked according to the “course of this world,” we were “sons of disobedience,” we carried out the “desires of the body and mind,” and we “were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

Then, much like Genesis 6, we hear a statement of grace, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.”

Our tendency is to look at Noah’s generation and shake our Pharisaical heads in disgust at their disobedience. However, when we know the holiness of God and our own hearts, we recognize that we too are worthy of severe judgment and wrath. We too deserved to be drowned in the fury of God’s holy justice. Then we realize we too have been saved by God’s grace, just like Noah. We did not merit God’s favor nor did we earn his saving effort in Christ. Like Noah, we have experienced grace because of God, not because of us.

# JANUARY 9

## *Genesis 11*



**A**FTER GOD'S SEVERE JUDGMENT OF THE FLOOD WE MAY HAVE CERTAIN EXPECTATIONS.

We may assume that the generations who come from Noah would worship the Lord, fear their Creator, and seek to honor God and do that which is right in his eyes. Yet, we learn that the effects of the fall are still present as soon as Noah gets off the boat. Mankind, in spite of knowing the judgment of God, continue in their rebellion.

The peoples of the earth gather together, not to worship, but in opposition to God. Before and after the flood God commanded his people to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28; 9:1,7). Man, being in the image of God, was to subdue the whole earth and rule over creation. Now, we find a total disregard of God in the cry of the people. Their aim was not obedience and honor to God but the pursuit of their own desires. Instead they would say, "let us make a name for ourselves." They sought to establish their own kingdom, control their own fate, and garner their own praise. The tower they sought to build was defiance against God.

God brings forth a confusion of their language. This practical linguistic hurdle caused them to be dispersed from the city and tower, and spread. Instead of spreading over the earth in the blessing of God, the peoples would spread across the earth under the curse of God. "The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples" (Psalm 33:10).

God's purpose will stand no matter how creative or organized the opposition may be. Rise up today and be confident in your God. He will suppress all unrighteousness and end all who stand against him and his people. Don't fret. Though the nations rage, God will subdue and reign. Only his kingdom is forever!

# JANUARY 10

*Genesis 12:1-3*



**O**VER THESE NEXT FEW DAYS WE WILL BE WALKING WITH ONE OF THE GREAT MEN OF THE BIBLE, ABRAM, WHO WAS LATER CALLED ABRAHAM.

Genesis 11–25 documents Abram’s earthly journey and how God was faithful in his care for and in his leadership of this important Patriarch.

I am reminded of the precious truths Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24). It is evident that God was the one calling Abram; “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you’” (Genesis 12:1).

It is so important to remember as God’s children that God not only calls, but He is also faithful to bring it to pass.

Note the *I wills* in Genesis 12:1–3, “I will show you [the land],” “I will make of you a great nation,” “I will bless you.” Sometimes it is only those promises and the reality that an Almighty God stands behind them that will keep us going as we walk with the Lord.

On our journey with the Lord we may often feel like Abram as the writer of Hebrews describes him, “And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” (Hebrews 11:8b) A genuine faith in God and his promises will lead to obedience to go forth as He directs, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance” (Hebrews 11:8a).

May God graciously give us such faith!



# JANUARY 11

*Genesis 12:10-20*



**F**AILURE, DOUBT, MANIPULATION OF THE TRUTH, AND FEAR OF MAN ARE ALL PART OF OUR WALK WITH GOD BECAUSE IT IS PART OF OUR DNA AS BELIEVERS IN A FALLEN WORLD.

These traits become evident when we lose perspective that God is able to meet our needs and that what is happening is by his sovereign design. Abram demonstrates these traits in Genesis 12:10–20.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, longtime pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church, in Philadelphia, gives some excellent insight into this story.

“God had brought Abram all the way from Ur, not in order to let him die of hunger. The famine was to test and strengthen the faith by which Abram was learning to walk. Faith is not a mushroom that grows overnight in damp soil; it is an oak tree that grows for a thousand years under the blast of the wind and rain. But it must be made manifest that even the faith of Abram is nothing without the God of Abram. Faith is not a work to be regarded but a gift to be developed. After all of the unconditional promises, there was the promise of daily blessing, conditional upon dwelling in the land. Abram fails in this test by not trusting God to keep his honor pure in taking care of the pilgrim whom He has brought so far.”

It is the tests that make plain the status and genuineness of our faith. As we read the story we once again see God’s sustaining and protecting grace in the lives of his children (1 Peter 1:3–9).

Notice how he sovereignly protects Sarai from Pharaoh and at the same time adds to Abram’s wealth. It is to God’s glory and praise that Abram comes through this test.

# JANUARY 12

*Genesis 12-13*



**T**HERE ARE TWO THINGS THAT CHARACTERIZE ABRAHAM THROUGHOUT HIS DAYS OF WALKING WITH GOD, A TENT AND AN ALTAR.

Once Abram entered into the land God called him to inherit he builds and altar and calls upon the Lord. “Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.’ So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and **pitched his tent**, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there **he built an altar to the LORD** and called upon the name of the LORD” (Genesis 12:7-8).

The altar is is a place of worship, sacrifice and communion. We should respond likewise with worship and communion to the promises and gifts of God. We often become insensitive to the goodness and mercy of God and count it as a common thing. God calls us to acknowledge his grace and live to the praise of his glory! (Ephesians 1:1-14).

After Abram’s lapse of faith in going to Egypt, he returns to the place of God’s promise and once again builds an altar. “So Abram **moved his tent** and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there **he built an altar to the LORD**” (Genesis 13:18).

Abram’s life was that of a nomad, and we learn that for him, as well as all believers, that a life of faith is always subject to change without notice. Abraham kept his eye on the eternal prize, that city whose builder and designer is God!

# JANUARY 13

*Genesis 13-14, 18*



**T**HE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ABRAM AND LOT IS BOTH INTERESTING AND INSTRUCTIONAL, AND WE CAN LEARN MUCH FROM ABRAM ABOUT HOW TO TREAT AN ERRING BROTHER.

There was strife between the herdsmen of Abram and the herdsmen of Lot. How will this be resolved? By fighting? Deceit? Accusation? Abram takes the honorable approach, one outlined by Christ and given to us by Paul. “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phillipians 2:4).

Abram recognized that his relationship to Lot as a kinsman meant something, and he did the unselfish thing, giving Lot the first right to choose the portion of land he desired while Abram would take what was left. How often do we as God’s children get blinded by our rights and desires and trample our brothers and sisters during a time of strife rather than giving preference to them?

Genesis 14 records Lot and all his possessions were taken captive in a battle between several kings. When word reaches Abram about Lot’s capture, he is moved to go to battle and rescue his nephew. It would have been easy to say that Lot was getting what he deserved or to ignore the situation, but Abram did the right thing in restoring Lot. Galatians 6:1 reminds us, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.”

It is sometimes hard to like those who have caused us trouble, let alone to agonize in interceding for them, but it is the gracious and right thing to do. Lot’s life and family ended in shame and ruin, but Abram was a faithful and honorable friend. Let this serve as a means of grace to help us treat others in a God honoring way.

# JANUARY 14

*Genesis 16-17*



**I**T IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THE AGE MARKERS PROVIDED IN THE BIBLICAL STORY.

Abram is 75 when he responds to God's call and leaves Haran. God makes a covenant with him and promises to make him a great nation. Abram expresses deep frustration when, after several years, he still has no children. There is no age marker here, but chapter 16 indicates that 10 years had passed. 10 years! That is a long time to wait when you really want something.

God responds to Abram's frustration, reminding him of who he is. "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great'" (Genesis 15:1). God renews the covenant and ratifies it. At this 10 year marker, Sarai takes matters into her own hands and tells Abram to take her servant, Hagar, as his wife and have a child with her. Preempting God's timetable is always an unwise decision, and the birth of Ishmael was a source of bitter grief and trouble.

The next time marker is when Abram is 99. At this point, 24 years have elapsed since God first made his promise to Abram. That is a long time to maintain your faith in a promise that remains unfulfilled. Once again, note how God comes to Abram. "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.' Then Abram fell on his face" (Genesis 17:1-3). What a life lesson!

We must stay focused on the character of God. He is the Almighty and will bring to pass what He has said in just the right time. Abram is given a promise that he will be the father of a multitude of nations, and his name is changed to Abraham. We, like Abraham, must fall on our faces before God and wait patiently for him!

# JANUARY 15

*Genesis 21-22*



**A**S FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST, WE LIVE IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF HOPE - A PLACE OF CONFIDENCE KNOWING GOD WILL FAITHFULLY FULFILL HIS PROMISES, AND HIS WORD WILL HOLD TRUE IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE.

We can so easily doubt, take matters into our own hands, and grow weary while waiting for God. The prophet Isaiah reminds us, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose...I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it'" (Isaiah 46:9-11).

God had promised to make Abram a great nation, but 25 years passed before that promise became a reality in Isaac. Joy, relief, and celebration were great at the arrival of the promised son, but what would follow after several years was an almost unthinkable test.

"Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Genesis 22:1-2). What was in Abraham's mind after many years of walking with God and growing in his understanding of his true identity? "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (Genesis 22:8).

This story is theologically rich and serves our understanding of the grand redemption story of the Scriptures. It also instructs our hearts as we engage in waiting for promises to be fulfilled and enduring the tests that God sovereignly brings into our lives. Simply stated, we must maintain our faith in the God who alone is worthy of it. Look to the great I AM!

# JANUARY 16

## *Genesis 24*



**F**EW THINGS SATISFY MORE THAN COMPLETING A TASK SUCCESSFULLY FOR GOD. DAYS FILLED WITH SUCCESS CAN PROPEL US FORWARD WITH PEACE, JOY, AND A SENSE OF A JOB WELL DONE.

Nearing death, Abraham wanted to secure Isaac's future concerning a wife. Commissioning his servant, Abraham sent him back to his relatives to find a wife among them rather than from the Canaanites.

"The LORD, the God of heaven ... He will send his angel before you" (Genesis 24:7). Going forward on that faith, the servant did several things that serve as a good model for us in our service to God.

**1. Identify God's task and begin it:** Abraham commissioned his servant to find a wife for Isaac. As Christians, tasks lay before us. Identify them and begin completing them. Abraham's task had already been put in God's hands. So, get going. Begin the task.

**2. Pray:** The servant traveled to Abraham's hometown, and the critical moment arrived. Before God, he asked him to reveal the right woman (Genesis 24:12-14). Like the servant did, we should pray to God specifically and frequently. Pray.

**3. Look for an answer:** God had already set in motion the answer even while the servant prayed (Genesis 24:15-21). Jesus reminds us that when we ask, we will receive (Matthew 7:8). Faith that God will answer is part of every good prayer.

**4. Thank God:** Jesus once healed ten lepers. Only one of those lepers returned to thank him (Luke 17:17-18). Be sure to thank God.

**5. See the task to the end:** Though God showed the servant the right woman, conversations and approval from the family were still needed. Completing a task often involves cycles. Repeat these steps until the task is done.

# JANUARY 17

*Genesis 25:29-34*



**M**USIC, MOVIES, WORK, SCHOOL, FOOD, CLOTHING, SHOES, CARS, THE LAWN, FRIENDS, A TWEET, AND FACEBOOK.

It is impossible not to get distracted by everything going on all around. Who can help not looking at the phone when it dings with a new message? Does God view those things as sin?

Everyone needs food, and most of the time no sin is involved. If someone eats too much, though, it can lead to sin, or if someone gets distracted by food, that can lead to sin as well.

The same can happen with all the things in our lives. If we place too much focus on anything, or spend too much time in a thing, we might slip past the line of “it’s okay,” to, “maybe I’m sinning.”

Esau returned from working in the field. Jacob had prepared dinner, and when Esau saw it, his hunger got the better of him. Esau sold his birthright for the meal. The book of Hebrews calls Esau sexually immoral and unholy for what he did (Hebrews 12:16)!

Esau needed the food, but he failed by counting his birthright as less important than that meal, trading it for something that profited him only temporarily. He despised his birthright (Genesis 25:34).

The Christian must guard against making such trade-offs in life. A Christian’s relationship with Jesus ought to take priority over everything else. In Jeremiah 2:11, God charged his people with exchanging his glory for things that don’t profit.

While all the things have a proper place, the things of Christ must occupy the first place in the heart. Men and women of God, “Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11). Do not trade great things for things that are worthless.

# JANUARY 18

*Genesis 25-26*



**W**HAT A PERFECT DAY!" WOULDN'T IT BE GREAT TO BE ABLE TO SAY THAT EVERY SINGLE DAY?

Rarely, however, does a day earn the title, "The Perfect Day!" Much of the trouble often comes from other people. In Genesis 25-26, Isaac and his family had trouble with one another and with others. Here is a list of all the trouble that took place:

- Abraham died (25:7).
- Rebekah couldn't have children (25:21a).
- Rebekah's twins grappled in the womb (25:22-23).
- Esau sold his birthright because he was hungry (25:29-34).
- Isaac and his family suffered from a famine (26:1).
- Isaac lied to Abimelech about Rebekah (26:7).
- Abimelech rebuked Isaac for his deception (26:8-11).
- Abimelech told Isaac he must leave the land (26:16).
- Men of Gerar took Isaac's wells more than once (26:19-21).
- Isaac and Rebekah struggled with Esau over making a poor choice for a wife (26:34-35).

In spite of these, God's grace and blessing appeared regularly. God assured Isaac of his presence and blessing, Rebekah conceived, God reaffirmed his promise of blessing to Isaac, God blessed Isaac a hundredfold, Isaac became rich, and God promised again to bless Isaac. God's grace shines through like the rays of the sun providing warmth and light to the world. Isaac is God's man, and that trumps everything else.

Even if things don't go the right way, God's grace and blessing upon his people never fail. He provides refuge, comfort, and blessing in life. Run to Christ. He will not turn away one of his children. Every day is truly a perfect day.



# JANUARY 19

## *Genesis 27*



**G**OD BUILT IN EACH PERSON THE NEED TO PROVIDE AND PROTECT HIMSELF.

The desire for comfort makes people pursue the path that leads to comfort, and the response of fear makes people run from danger. The paths of providing and protecting given by God help people to take care of themselves. Jesus said that we are to love others as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39). The same care that we take to provide and protect ourselves is the same care we should give to others.

These pursuits can be skewed by sin. On the one hand, over-indulgence is epidemic in our day, and one of the Ten Commandments prohibits taking what belongs to others. On the other hand, laziness and lack of work are scorned in Scripture. Living in fear can often reflect lack of trust in God. Whenever we follow a sinful path, the results never turn out to be positive.

In the case of today's passage, Jacob, with the help of his mother, acted deceitfully and took Esau's blessing. Esau cried out, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing" (Genesis 27:36).

Without doubt, before Jacob and Esau were born, God meant for Jacob to have both the birthright and the blessing (cf. Rom. 9:13). Jacob's trickery, however, tore his family apart. It would be many years before the rift closed.

A little lie here and a small deceit there might not result in a fracture as extensive as Jacob's, but sinful choices will always leave their marks. Lying is of the devil, and the Christian should use the mouth to speak the truth (Colossians 3:9). Follow God's way. He will always provide a path that is honoring to him.

# JANUARY 20

## *Genesis 28*



**T**HE PROMISE OF THE GOSPEL IS A PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE. THE WHOLE BIBLE IS ABOUT GOD'S PLAN OF REDEMPTION. CHRIST CAME THAT WE MIGHT HAVE LIFE.

Once again God's grace shone like a beacon on a dark night. Jacob had deceived his father, split apart his family, and had to leave quickly in fear of his life. Yet, God did not forsake him. Falling asleep, he dreamed of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven.

The angels of God ascended and descended upon the ladder, like an angelic escalator between heaven and earth. God spoke to Jacob and reaffirmed the promises made to Abraham and Isaac. The promise was that Jacob's descendants would fill the earth.

Fleeing for his life, Jacob might have wondered if he would ever return again, but God told him that one day he would be able to come back. God told Jacob that he would bless him and prosper him.

Awaking, Jacob called the place "Bethel," meaning, "the house of God." Jacob vowed to serve and follow God from that day forward.

The gospel of John alludes to Jacob's ladder. Jesus, in speaking to Nathanael and calling him to be his disciple, said that he would see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man (John 1:51).

What Jesus said was remarkable. He is Jacob's ladder, and the way to heaven. Just as Jacob did not deserve God's blessing, neither do any of us. Everyone has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Yet, God is gracious. He opened the heavens. Christ came to the earth. He died for our sins, and anyone believing in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. Put your trust in Jesus today.

# JANUARY 21

*Genesis 29-31*



**E**ACH DAY BRINGS A WHOLE SET OF ISSUES, CIRCUMSTANCE, AND PROBLEMS.

Jesus said not to worry about tomorrow, because each day carries “its own trouble” (Matthew 6:33). Often, though, the busyness of the day squeezes God from the picture. Arising in the morning, running through the day, and falling asleep at night, our minds turn to God far less than they should.

Jacob saw the ladder extending between heaven and earth, and saw God in a vision, promising to bless him. He woke up, and went on his way. He worked seven years and married Leah. A week later, he married Rachel, and worked seven more years. He started having children. Not one kid, or two, or even three, but twelve kids!

His family increased in size, but his flocks and herds grew, too. Time continued to pass. Twenty years went by altogether. During all that time, God wasn’t much in the picture. Most of the references to God were made during the birth of a child. Jacob seemed to have forgotten. We are told little of his relationship to God.

After all those years, God appeared to him, and reminded him of the vision of the ladder at Bethel and the promises He had made to him. God also instructed him to return to his homeland.

The Bible is full of promises, like a fruit tree full of fruit. God wants us to remember these promises and to *pick* them into our lives. We must not forget God by the cares of the day, but remember God who bears us through the day.

As you come across the promises of God from a sermon, a Bible study, or from your own Bible reading, write those promises down and keep a list before your eyes. Remind yourself of the promises, and trust God to keep them. Walk in the blessings of God.

# JANUARY 22

*Genesis 32-33*



**P**RAYER IS THE MOST IMPORTANT BUSINESS THAT THE CHRISTIAN CAN BE ABOUT.

We all know we are supposed to pray. Knowing to pray isn't the problem. The problem is actually getting around to doing it.

When we pray, the only wrestling we do is with ourselves. We wrestle against distractions and falling asleep. I am convicted by Jesus' words, "And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, 'So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak'" (Matthew 26:40-41).

The real kind of praying can be grueling. It is spiritual business trying to break free of physical weight. Pray, we must, though, and pray hard in faith. Prayer can be engaging and absorbing.

Jacob faced a crisis in his life. He left Laban after all those years of service and returned to a brother whom he cheated and who was bent on killing him. To make matters worse, when Esau heard Jacob was on his way, he set out to meet him with an army.

Jacob got before God and wrestled with him all night long. He refused to let go until God blessed him. He could have given up. He could have said he was too tired. He could have stopped for a number of reasons, I'm sure. But he didn't. He persevered until God agreed to bless him.

God blessed him, indeed, and went before him as Jacob met Esau. The story ends favorably. Esau and Jacob reconciled, and Jacob returned home.

Remembering God involves prayer. Like Jacob, we should go to prayer with faith and persevere in it until we sense the blessing and peace of God in our hearts. Start praying, and don't stop praying.

# JANUARY 23

*Genesis 34-36*



**W**E SHOULD FIX OUR FENCE. WE CAN GET SO USED TO SEEING OUR BROKEN FENCE, THAT WE STOP NOTICING IT. WHEN A VISITOR COMES FOR A VISIT, THE FIRST THING THEY NOTICE IS THE BROKEN FENCE.

Fences can be the blind spots in our lives. Blind spots are those things we don't see about ourselves that others see right away. Part of following God involves taking notice of those things that are broken, and taking care of them. I am not just talking about character flaws, but those things in our lives that God is not pleased with.

Jacob's daughter Dinah was ravished by some of the local men. Simeon and Levi, in turn, schemed and killed all the men of the city responsible. It was a dastardly act, and Jacob replied, "You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land..." (Genesis 34:30).

God instructed Jacob to take his family to Bethel, the place where He first appeared to him after fleeing from Esau. Jacob called for his family to, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments." (Genesis 35:2).

Put away the foreign gods? Didn't Jacob and his family love the Lord? What were they doing with foreign gods?

Everything we give more attention to than God is a foreign god in our hearts. Those are the things in our lives that we don't always see - the things God is not pleased with. Renewing his commitment to God, Jacob exhorted his family to purify themselves.

Let's approach God anew. Let's examine our hearts and, by God's grace, put aside the foreign gods. Let's remove everything that might hinder our relationship with God. Let's purify our lives.

# JANUARY 24

*Genesis 37-38*



**H**OW DISAPPOINTING IT CAN BE WHEN SOMEONE BREAKS A PROMISE THEY MADE TO US.

We set our hopes on what they said, but to them it did not mean very much because they did not give their word with the same seriousness as we took it.

In the midst of the story of Joseph we find a peculiar story about Judah. He went off visiting some Canaanite friend of his and ended up marrying a Canaanite woman. Judah had three children with this woman. Their names were Er, Onan, and Shelah.

Over many years, the kids grew up, and Er married a woman named Tamar. Things didn't go well. Er died. Onan died. Then Judah made a promise to Tamar - wait until Shelah, his third born son, was old enough to marry, and she could have him.

Judah did not intend on keeping his word to Tamar. He was afraid his only remaining son would die. Things continued to get worse.

First, Judah's wife died. Second, Tamar waited patiently, but realized that Judah did not plan to give her Shelah to marry. Soon afterwards, she learned that Judah planned on traveling nearby. She disguised herself as a harlot, and ended up sleeping with Judah, though he did not know it was her, and he impregnated her.

Once Judah discovered Tamar was pregnant through harlotry, he set out to have her stoned. When it was proved that he was the father, Judah finally humbled himself and acknowledged that he did not plan on keeping his promise to her.

Tamar and her son by Judah end up in the line of the Messiah, Jesus. What a gracious God we have. He can turn the worst of circumstances for his glory. God is a God who keeps his promises, and, as his children, we should, too.

# JANUARY 25

## *Genesis 39*



**I** READ THE BIBLE STORIES OF THE PEOPLE OF GREAT FAITH, AND THE AMAZING THINGS GOD DID THROUGH THEM, AND WANT TO SEE GOD WORKING THROUGH MY LIFE THE SAME WAY HE WORKED THROUGH THEIR LIVES.

While it is easy to focus on the great and desirable things, it is easy to overlook some of the stuff that goes with it. A careful look at all the lives of those who had faith in Scripture will often reveal some not so good stuff in their lives.

God did some amazing things for Joseph. It started with Jacob's love and a nice coat, but then his brothers were jealous and hated him. God revealed the future to Joseph through some dreams. These dreams, however, made his family more angry. They nearly killed him for it, but sold him to Egypt instead.

His slavery lasted a while, but God prospered him in the house of his master. While suffering by being a slave in Egypt, rather than with his family in Canaan, God made Joseph succeed in everything he did.

After a while, his master's wife came on to him, which landed Joseph in prison, having been falsely accused. But even in prison, the Lord prospered him (Genesis 39:21-23).

Nearly every miracle in the Bible arises out of some kind of adversity or negative circumstance. Just because bad things are happening, does not mean that God is not at work. He is. Actually, bad things form the ground out of which the miraculous arise.

Instead of getting down and discouraged, look up with the expectation that comes with faith. Keep having faith, and allow God to work through you no matter what situation you are in. A miracle is on its way.

# JANUARY 26

*Genesis 40*



**G**ETTING DOWN BECAUSE OF ALL THE HARD THINGS IN LIFE IS VERY EASY. SOMETIMES, THE SMALLEST THINGS CAN DEFLATE US EMOTIONALLY AND DRAG US TO THE GROUND.

Some live in a constant pity party. People in our lives expect us to be there for them and to help them through their troubles. “How can I help them? Don’t they know all the trouble I am going through? I don’t have the strength to help them. I can barely handle my own things.” These common sentiments can be burdensome and keep us back from fulfilling God’s plan in our lives.

If anyone had the right to have a pity party, it was Joseph. He was abducted by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused by his master’s wife, and thrown into prison. All of this went on for years and years and he *did* think about it (Genesis 40:14-15).

But Joseph was unique. He did not focus on all the horrible things that happened to him. He did not allow them to drag him down. One morning, he noticed that two of his fellow prisoners were upset. Rather than go on his way, he stopped to find out, “Why are your faces downcast today?” (Genesis 40:7b).

God used that small act of compassion to set in motion a series of events that would lead to him become second in command in Egypt.

God calls us to be compassionate, caring, and helping. He calls us to carry the burdens of others and to serve others. We are not to wait until everything is going great for us before we help others. We have to be on the lookout to help and serve others today, regardless of our own circumstances. I think we will find that God will turn things around for us, when we are about the business of helping others.



# JANUARY 27

## *Genesis 41*



**I**N ROMANS 11:33 WE ARE TOLD THAT GOD'S WAYS ARE PAST FINDING OUT.

I know that if I were to plan the events of my life and the timing of everything, I might do things a little differently. Of course, God knows best, but sometimes when my flesh has sway, I might hope for something else.

Joseph interpreted dreams for the baker and the cup-bearer, and it all turned out just as he said it would. It took two *long* years and a dream by Pharaoh, however, for the cup-bearer to remember Joseph.

Early on, Joseph must have looked every single day for some sign of favor from the cup-bearer that would enable him to get out of the pit he was in. Nothing happened, though, for a long time.

Finally, Pharaoh had a dream and Joseph was summoned into his presence. He interpreted Pharaoh's dream and was made second in command in order to prepare for the years of famine that were about to come upon the land.

Joseph was thirty years old when he began to rule in Egypt (Genesis 41:46). He was seventeen years old when the whole episode with his family began (Genesis 37:2). Thirteen years passed from the time Joseph was with his family until he began to rule for Pharaoh. That is a long time for things to work themselves out.

It is hard to wait, but persevering with a constant trust in God is the lot of the Christian life. We don't know when things might work out or change, but God does. As his servants, our lives are his to do with as He desires.

We should keep seeking him and trust him to accomplish his plans through us. Wait on the Lord, "if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Romans 8:25).

# JANUARY 28

*Genesis 42-45*



**E**XPERIENCING THE PROVISION OF GOD IS NOT ALWAYS IMMEDIATE. SOMETIMES THE PATH CAN BE SLOW AND HARD.

Joseph and his brothers finally met again after many years. Only Joseph knew it initially. He kept his identity hidden from them. The secret remained about two years, since there were still nearly five years of famine when Joseph made himself known to them.

Why did Joseph keep himself hidden for that time? Why did he make his brothers and father suffer anxiously through the famine, without Simeon, and the necessity of bringing Benjamin? Why go through all that, and more, before reconciling?

The path for Joseph was long and hard. Years passed, and yet it was God who had taken him to Egypt and orchestrated the series of events. Why go through all that? God could have provided for the Israelites in many different ways.

Maybe the long, drawn out story of Joseph is a picture of the price needed to be paid for us. While God used Joseph to provide and preserve God's people, true provision and preservation are found in the work of Christ.

Sometimes the path to fixing our relationships is a hard. The ultimate sacrifice for reconciliation was paid by Jesus. He died in order to secure our forgiveness and reconcile us to himself.

What a hefty price to pay! Christ provided for us the forgiveness of sins. He also has preserved for himself a remnant. We are that remnant, the children of God. And just as Joseph was finally reunited with his family, so the Christian has the hope of eternal life in God's presence. I hope you have you asked Jesus to forgive you of your sins and have invited him into your life.

# JANUARY 29

*Genesis 46-47*



**T**HE CALL OF GOD CAN OFTEN TAKE US TO A STRANGE AND FOREIGN PLACE, TO AN UNCOMFORTABLE AND CHALLENGING PLACE.

We struggle and hesitate, even though we know that God has called us to it. Following God might mean speaking up at work or at home for what is right, teaching a Bible study or watching the kids during church, or becoming a pastor or missionary. As we go, we must put our trust in the God who gave us the call.

Jacob set off for Egypt. I am sure he did not know what awaited him, except the prospect of seeing his son. Nevertheless, he must have been hesitant to go. He offered a sacrifice, and received God's assurance that this was what he was supposed to do.

God appeared to him and told not to be afraid to go to Egypt, that he was going with him, and that he would bless his descendants mightily. Finally, God said he would bring Jacob and his descendants back to the land of Canaan (Genesis 46:3-4).

Jacob and Joseph reunited after many years. They hugged and many tears were shed. Having seen his beloved son again, Jacob was content to die. He didn't, not for a while yet, but the pain of his life had come to a positive resolution.

Joseph took care of his family. He set them up in the best land, and the blessings of the prosperity of Egypt was theirs. They might not have deserved it, but after forgiveness had been given, the blessings flowed. For once, all the hardship, toil, and pain had disappeared. Jacob and his family entered a time of peace and prosperity.

Blessing and satisfaction can be ours, too, as we go forward with what God has called us to do. Just as he promised Jacob, he will be with us, and he will bless us as we walk in obedience to him.

# JANUARY 30

*Genesis 48-49*



**O**UR PHYSICAL SENSES DOMINATE OUR LIVES. WE RELY HEAVILY ON SEEING WITH OUR EYES, TOUCHING WITH OUR HANDS, AND HEARING WITH OUR EARS.

Our spiritual senses, however, need tuning up. We see through our spiritual eyes with blurred vision (1 Corinthians 13:12). When it comes to hearing with our spiritual ears, we need hearing aids. We must deal with this order of things for now, until that day when the natural body is raised a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:44).

Jacob's death was at hand, and the time came to pass the blessing on to his children. Normally, this is an act reserved for the oldest son, and indeed, Jacob honored Ephraim with that distinction. Jacob, however, went on to bless each of his children.

Up until that point, the promises of God had come to individuals: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But it was time for the people to begin multiplying in number as the stars of the heavens and as the sand of the sea. Rather than a blessing to a single child, Jacob blessed them all.

In a similar way, the blessings of God have come to us Christians, as children of God. Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

The blessings are not ours at some future time. They are ours now. The problem is that we are spiritually dull. How important it is for us to keep growing in the grace and knowledge of our Savior. The blessings are ours, and by faith we can walk in the richness of what our Father has passed to us through his Son, Jesus. Let us walk in our spiritual blessings.

# JANUARY 31

## *Genesis 50*



**I**T DOESN'T TAKE MUCH FOR THINGS TO SNOWBALL OUT OF OUR CONTROL.

We have very little control over the words and actions of other people. As a pastor, I spend much time preparing messages and delivering messages from the Bible to other people with the hope that my words will impact them in some way. More often than not, while what I say is received with enthusiasm, and with the nod of the head, and a smile across the face, the words fade away. Change comes only little by little over a long period of time. Nevertheless, God is in control. He is the great orchestra conductor, and he weaves into the symphony of our lives all the things necessary for his glory.

Now that Jacob had died, Joseph's brothers once again worried that Joseph harbored deep seated resentment and would unleash revenge upon them for what they had done to him. Joseph patiently assured them that they had nothing to fear. "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

God took all their bitterness, jealousy, and hatred. He took their wicked plot to sell Joseph and to be rid of him. He took it all and worked it into a masterpiece of victory, blessing, and provision for all.

The brothers had no intent of honoring God at all. Their actions were sinful to the core, inspired by the devil. God, however, worked a work, and turned the sin into a glorious blessing.

So, regardless of the unkind words and actions of others, and, regardless of their sinful intent and motivation, God is still in control. Trust in him no matter what. Persevere and lift your voice in praise to the Sovereign Ruler of your life. He is at work creating a masterpiece through you to the praise of the glory of his name.

# FEBRUARY 1

## *Exodus 1*



**E**XPERTS SAY IT USUALLY TAKES A NEW PASTOR SEVEN YEARS TO GAIN THE TRUST OF THE PEOPLE AFTER A LONG-TERM PASTOR.

God desires to grow the church, but he also desires the people to be a part of seeing his church become what it needs to become. If the people are reluctant, seven years is not enough time for some to give the new leadership their loyalty. It can be a strange journey.

Joseph had been the long-time, beloved Hebrew leader in a foreign country. Joseph dies, and simultaneously the Hebrew population explodes. Family is important in Jewish culture, so the procreation a half dozen children or more was common practice. Eventually the population had grown to an alarming rate for the new Pharaoh. He had “not known Joseph” so the relationship between he and the Israelites was different. In his mind, the slaughter of innocent children was not a crime, but a necessity. When leadership changes, even in the secular government, perspective and motive can change at the same time.

I am not comparing the changing of the guard in the church and the secular world the same. But, I have seen how hard it is to respect the position of a new leader, even if I was not in favor of that person who received the assignment.

Reflect upon the changes you may have had to deal with in leadership. It may even be something you have taken on yourself. Do you pray for and love the new leader? Do you support them in public as well as private, even though you may disagree with some of their policies or tactics? Read Romans 13:1-2 along with Exodus 1 and evaluate your heart.

# FEBRUARY 2

## *Exodus 3-4*



**W**HEN IT COMES TO MY THOUGHTS, OR MY FUTURE, OR MY WANTS, I WILL FIGHT TO THE DEATH AGAINST A GRIZZLY BEAR.

On the other hand, it almost seems God has come and rained on our parade with fire and brimstone when God desires to be involved in our future, or career, or even our everyday activity.

Consider Moses in Exodus 3-4. He has run like a scalded dog to the desert, trashed his Hebrew roots, and hidden from his pursuers. The problem with that kind of thought is like David, “Where can I go to escape Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence” (Psalm 139:7)? In the mountains near Mount Horeb, Moses was content. He was now eighty years old and in the beginning of his retirement. He had now found a wife and was enjoying being away from the hustle and bustle of Egypt for the last forty years. Everything was just perfect.

Enter God. You know the story. God Almighty shows up in a bush that was burning, but not consumed. In only the way that God can, he got Moses’ attention with the holiness factor. Moses falls on his face in fear, and listens to what God has to say. After the initial conversation, five times Moses has an excuse to reject God’s plan. Five times! Finally, “the LORD’s anger burned against Moses,” and he convinces Moses of his calling to free the slaves from captivity.

Are you in the coasting mode? Are you in retirement and consider yourself off limits? Consider the possibilities that God is not through using you. What would it take to move you from that coasting mode to a place of service? Hopefully not a burning bush.

# FEBRUARY 3

## *Exodus 7*



**T**OO MANY BELIEVERS WANT TO POSSESS THE GIFTS OF ANOTHER BELIEVER, NEVER CONSIDERING THE RESPONSIBILITY THAT COMES WITH THOSE GIFTS.

In the 1990's, a wonderful singer named Michael English was a rising star in Christian music. I was jealous of his voice, demeanor, and frankly, his looks. He seemed to be running on all cylinders. I took a group of students to see him in concert. As he belted out the high notes that I envied, little did I know that two weeks later he would stand before his fans and his God confessing that he had been unfaithful to his wife. I was crushed and disappointed by the news, but God used that tragic day in Michael English's life to remind me that no man can stand alone in ministry and live to tell about it.

I am thankful for the picture of comradery in Exodus 7. Moses partnered with his brother, Aaron. They stood alongside each other, and attacked the gods of Pharaoh and Egyptian cultism. I cannot imagine the strength and confidence that it took to stand up against one of the most powerful men in the known world! Pharaoh has money, slaves, wives, an army, and sorcerers standing with him. What more would he need? As Moses and Aaron approached this well supported pagan, they not only had each other to lean on; they had God working for them. In the end, "Each one threw down his staff, and it became a serpent. But Aaron's staff swallowed their staffs" (12).

As you serve the LORD today, don't think of yourself as only one person. Look around you, and partner with someone you know is a strong believer, and someone who will stand beside you. Together, allow God to use you to stand in the most difficult of situations in this day of unbelief!



# FEBRUARY 4

*Exodus 8-10*



**I** WAS A BIG FAN OF DR. SEUSS BOOKS GROWING UP. I WAS INTRIGUED BY HIS CREATIVITY WITH WORDS, HIS CHARACTERS, AND HIS ABILITY TO USE NUMBERS TO TEACH CHILDREN AND HAVE FUN AT THE SAME TIME.

I always wondered what it would be like to sit around the house and figure out new lingo for a new book. What a creative man!

When I first started reading the Bible, I was also intrigued by God's creativity. First, he created the heavens and the earth, man and woman, then man messes it all up. Even after the flood, things go downhill from there!

After the Israelites are too big for the Pharaoh's liking, Moses and Aaron put on God's "Greatest Show on Earth." As I read about the plagues, I used to wonder why he chose the plagues in that fashion. Why frogs, gnats, flies, hail, locusts, or darkness? Why not just one huge plague that encompassed all these plagues? The bottom line -- God is very organized and intentional about his work.

Please understand, Egyptians worshiped each of these idols in some form or fashion. What better way to exploit the gods of Egypt than to show not only the creativity of God, but his ultimate power over them. "The New American Commentary" states, "Their pantheistic view of the universe considered all things to be partakers of the divine ... began with the humiliation of the Nile." Not one of those idols could withstand the one who was sovereign over their very existence.

What is standing in the way of your full devotion to him? Put that one thing under the microscope of idolatry. If your priorities are in the wrong order, God will quickly show you that your idols will not stand the plague test.

# FEBRUARY 5

*Exodus 11-12*



**A**S A BELIEVER, SOMETIMES FAMILIARITY BREEDS LAZINESS.

These are humbling chapters. It would be easy to breeze over them and realize that we have heard these stories for years. Be challenged today to pay attention to the seriousness of this story.

Moses had gone to Pharaoh nine times, and nine times he warned him that God would strike. All nine times, Pharaoh refused to let the people go! What would it take for him to listen to the voice of God through Moses and Aaron? Hardhearted people are difficult projects.

With a final crushing blow, God cursed Egypt through the Passover Angel who came and took the lives of all firstborn in the land from royalty, to prisoner, even livestock. Scripture teaches that in Egypt “there wasn’t a house without someone dead” (12:30). Why didn’t God protect the Israelites as he had done during the previous nine plagues? Why did he require the act of slaughtering a lamb and placing it on the door post of their homes before the Passover angel came by? The answer is quite simple – faith. It was an act of faith for Moses to tell them what God had commanded them to do, and an act of faith for the people to surrender to that command to be saved!

The beautiful picture in this story is the slaughter of the lamb, and the blood on the door posts, as they represent an antecedent to the death of Christ 1500 years later. The Passover feast was established that night which Christ eventually fulfilled through his life and death.

Renew your heart towards what Christ has done for you through his death. Just like the innocent lamb that was slaughtered for each family that fatal evening in Egypt, Christ the lamb was slaughtered for you on the fatal afternoon in Jerusalem.

# FEBRUARY 6

*Exodus 14-15*



**W**ITHOUT ALL THE ANSWERS, GOD HAS REVEALED TO US THAT HE IS TRUSTWORTHY.

In the 1980's, it was announced that the mysterious ship, the Titanic, was found 3 miles in the depth of the ocean. People believed it was there, but only because of stories of the fatal April 1912 inaugural voyage. When pictures of the Titanic finally hit the media, it had been over 70 years since the ship had been seen. Now, it was clear to view what had been discovered. Mostly a mystery, now everyone confirmed their beliefs about the sunken vessel.

It is interesting that so many in our world find it hard to believe in a Bible that has been proven repeatedly that the events found in the pages are true. I believe that deep in our hearts we all have some doubt, but faith is a gift from God. When the Israelites had been pursued to the edge of the Red Sea by the stubborn Pharaoh and his army, faith was required once again. The Bible teaches that "the Angel of God who was going in front of the Israelite forces, moved and went behind them" (14:19). As they showed their faith, by walking into the Red Sea, they were protected from the army through God's hand. Walking on dry land, they reached the opposite side, and consequently watched the entire Egyptian army downed by the waves of destruction. Some critics claim that the Red Sea was not deep enough to drown them. But as someone once said, "That is just another miracle that God downed the entire Egyptian army in 3 feet of water!"

Regardless of the critics, "When Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and believed in him and in his servant Moses" (14:31). Sometimes seeing is believing, but sometimes it is about faith.

# FEBRUARY 7

*Exodus 16-17*



**T**HIS EVENT IN SCRIPTURE IS SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE THE ISRAELITES HAVE BEEN BLESSED BY THE LORD.

Moses commanded water to come out of the rocks, and God sent quail and manna to start their mornings. On the Sabbath, food was stored from the day before, and there was always enough for all. So now that the Egyptians have been destroyed, and food and water have been supplied, what could go wrong?

Enter the Amalekites, the descendants of Amalek, a grandson of Esau. This semi-nomadic people had been long-time enemies of Abraham, and now continued that reign. In chapter 17, they come to a place called Rephidim where the Amalekites come heavily against them. Moses commences to stand up on the hilltop and raise his staff to the LORD. If Moses kept his staff in the air, the Israelites were victorious. When his arms grew tired, the Amalekites would begin to grow stronger. Consequently, Aaron and another leader named Hur, had the wherewithal to get on each side of Moses and hold up or “stay up” the arms of Moses until the battle was won. What a great picture of support from second chair leadership! I think we could all learn a great lesson from this picture of support and love for the one who is in charge.

If you are a leader in any form or fashion, how you do treat those that are in authority over you? Do you have contempt for them, or do you pray for them, and hold up their arms in the middle of battle? In the end, “Moses built an altar and named it, ‘Jehovah-Nissi’” (17:15). This Hebrew name means “The LORD is My Banner” to indicate the act of keeping your eyes on Christ and the cross in the heat of spiritual battle!

# FEBRUARY 8

*Exodus 19-20*



**T**HE TEN COMMANDMENTS,” THE EPIC FILM BY CECIL B. DEMILLE AND PARAMOUNT PICTURES, HAD A LASTING EFFECT ON MY LIFE.

The entire movie was overwhelming, but especially the scene at the foot of Mount Sinai. Every time that I saw Moses, portrayed by Charleston Heston, turning his face away from God as he was writing the commandments in the stone, I shuddered. Why? Because to be in the presence of God is a humbling and incredible thought. The most frightful thought is to think of God literally handing his word over to Moses for the people.

As awesome as that thought may be, sometimes we miss the point of the Ten Commandments. God should be revered, yes. The mountain, the clouds, and the noises being enigmatic should be feared, yes. But what about the people? What role did they play in this scenario of events? Notice in Exodus 19:7, God tells Moses to receive a response from the people of their intentions when He approached them on the mountain. When Moses told them all the words the LORD had said this is their response, “We will do all that the LORD has spoken.” This verse is significant. Not only did Moses hand them the very instructions of God, but God demands a commitment to that word, even though it has yet to be read or followed.

Take a few moments to review the commandments that were given to the people of God. Do these commandments make you shudder, or help you understand the need for Christ? “Your ‘yes’ must be ‘yes,’ and your ‘no’ must be ‘no,’ so that you won’t fall under judgment” (James 5:12b). Be sure that when you tell God something, you follow it out as Christ did on the cross.

# FEBRUARY 9

*Exodus 21-24*



**T**HE FAMOUS POEM, “HIGH FLIGHT,” COULD BE HEARD ON TELEVISION, CLOSING OUT THE DAY’S PROGRAMMING, ACCOMPANYING IMAGES OF AN AIRPLANE IN FLIGHT, BEFORE THE NATIONAL ANTHEM.”

Growing up an Air Force brat, the poem moved me every time. It was recited by various Hollywood stars and by President Reagan following the Challenger tragedy. Written by John MaGee, an RCAF pilot who died in 1941, the last words of the poem demand your attention, “And, while with silent, lifting mind I’ve trod the high untrodden sanctity of space – put out my hand, and touched the face of God.” MaGee was raised by a missionary to China, so I believe he understood something personal about God. Let us not be presumptuous about how God reveals himself.

Exodus 24:9-11 is controversial. As the Israelites were to receive the complete Law of Moses, God summoned the 70 elders to come to the mountain. Prepared spiritually to meet God, that action seems a bit precarious. There was a purity about God recorded here. “God did not raise his hand against these leaders ... they saw God, and they ate and drank.” One cannot understand this verse completely. Some state that to see God is to die, but apparently these men saw some form of God and even fellowshiped with him. “The New American Commentary” states, “instead he showed himself ... so that the people’s leaders would understand that he was a willing party to his covenant ...”

Sometimes we assume too much about how God reveals himself. Look for God in all things, all circumstances, and all events. One might discover a different way in which God will show himself, even in our skeptical society.

# FEBRUARY 10

*Exodus 25-27*



**E**VEN THOUGH GOD IS A GOD OF ORDER AND STRUCTURE, THERE IS STILL AN ELEMENT OF TRUST THAT COMES THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST.

These chapters are a wonderful account of how God commanded the construction of the Tabernacle and its furnishings. He was very specific about the types of materials to be used, the dimensions of the tent and its furniture, and the quantities of each. Seemed simple, but what was God's desire for the Tabernacle? "They are to make a sanctuary for me so that I may dwell among them. You must make it according to all that I show you" (25:8-9). If one is not careful, the details of these chapters could easily swallow up the significance of this verse. God desires and always has desired to be in relationship with his creations. Even from the beginning, Adam and Eve walked in the garden with their Creator.

God is a God of order. Trained as a mechanical engineer, I can appreciate this fact. God does everything for a reason, and orders all things. He made the heavens and the earth, and the first humans with directive and purpose. Believing this is true, when I first became a believer, everything had to fit just right. I loved how the books of the Bible had order, and everything was like a puzzle for all the answers. Then one day, I came to controversial verses in Scripture and that struggle rocked my biblical world.

Has Satan taken away your joy because everything in Scripture and your life does not fit as neatly as you expected? Even Jesus said to his disciples, "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world" (John 16:33)!

# FEBRUARY 11

*Exodus 28-30*



**I** TRIED OUT FOR A MEN'S CHORUS IN HIGH SCHOOL. IT WAS MORE OF A FRATERNITY THAN A SINGING GROUP.

There was a probation period if you made it into the group. During that time of waiting, I had to carry around a brick for 2 weeks. It was with me when I went to school, church, work, or any other place. If I was caught without it, there was a price to pay. I made sure that I never found out what that price was!

God gives Moses more instruction for the priestly garments, the consecration of the priests, and various Tabernacle apparatuses. While reading through these instructions, I was humbled by one particular detail, the turban. One would think that this would be self-explanatory, but one detail caught my attention. God instructed Moses to engrave a plate, and attach it to the turban that says, "Holy to the LORD." That in itself is a little daunting, but then God continues, "It will be on Aaron's forehead so that Aaron may bear the guilt connected with the holy offerings . . . It will always be on his forehead, so that they may find acceptance with the LORD" (28:38). What if I had to wear something on my forehead that told everyone that I was a believer? What if the engraving on my cap said "Jesus Follower?" What if I wore a hat that said "Holy to the LORD" on it? Would I be able to represent him well in public as well as private? Aaron was chosen by a committee of one through his tribe. I wonder how he handled that pressure?

Next time that you are at the mall, a restaurant, or in the park, think about what it would be like to be labeled holy. What does that look like? How would you represent Christ in your community or in your family?



# FEBRUARY 12

## *Exodus 31-33*



**O**NE OF THE POPULAR SHOWS IN THE 1970'S WAS "KUNG FU." KWAI CHANG CAINE, PORTRAYED BY DAVID CARRIDINE, WAS THE COOLEST GUY I HAD EVER SEEN.

Caine was very young and sent to be trained in martial arts by an older blind gentleman. When the old man would place a pebble in his hand, and Caine could take it, he was free to go. Caine was impatient and tried consistently to snatch it, but to no avail. Finally, when Caine was much older, he successfully grabbed the pebble from his hand. The old man then said, "Grasshopper, it is time for you to leave." His patience and training paid off.

The Israelites were a very impatient people. Recall in Exodus 21 when the people said that they would agree to follow the LORD completely his commands for the sake of future generations. Moses is now on Mount Sinai receiving the instruction of the Law, and has been there 40 days and 40 nights. "When the people saw that Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, 'Come, make us a god'" (32:1). Moses had not even had a chance to present the Law to the people, and they already turned their backs on him! God told Moses to go down the mountain because of "a stiff-necked people." When Moses confronted Aaron about the golden calf he had made, his reply about the gold he received is a classic, "When I threw it in the fire, out came this calf!" Now that is some excuse!

Are you patient to watch how God is trying to teach you? Take some time today to listen to the LORD. He has many lessons to teach you, but sometimes we are too impatient and desire to find out own way.

# FEBRUARY 13

*Exodus 34-36*



**G**OD CAN USE ANYONE FOR HIS GLORY, EVEN AN ARTIST.

Michelangelo is best known for his incredible painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Milan, Italy. He used his talent for more than just that creation, but it took four years - 20 hours a day - to complete this picture of God's love for man. Michelangelo was reluctant to take on the project because he considered himself a sculptor more than a painter. He was working on Pope Julius II's marble tomb, but it took from 1508-1512 to complete the masterpiece that the world has enjoyed for the last 500 years.

It is interesting to read the names of seemingly obscure people in the Bible. It is easy to read a story and see a name that we don't recognize, and never consider them again. On the contrary, many of the names in scripture are quite significant. Everyone knows who David, or Paul are, but who is Bezalel? Though he was artisan by trade, "He has filled him with God's Spirit, with wisdom, understanding, and every ability in every kind of craft" (35:31) When God calls people to a task, he gives them everything they need to fulfill that ministry, position, or task, without fail. The design and construction of the Tabernacle were important responsibilities in the life of Israel. Names are important because God uses some of the most obscure people to complete his work.

Do you find yourself thinking your life as unimportant in the work of the Kingdom? Do you consider your ministry at church insignificant? Today, rethink those deceitful lies. God is willing to use anyone will fill you with his spirit and give you the skills to complete that task with zeal.

# FEBRUARY 14

*Exodus 37-40*



## **D**O YOU KNOW WHAT GOD HAS FOR YOU TO ACCOMPLISH TODAY?

My wife was great with our children, especially when it came to motivating them to finish a task. When she gave them instructions to clean their rooms, they were very detailed and written down. My son is a typical “I” in the DISC personality inventory. “They are enthusiastic, optimistic, talkative, persuasive, impulsive and emotional.” In other words, he was not good at accomplishing a task and the way he did things was good enough. That did not fly with my wife because she would always go to his room and inspect his cleaning methods. With my dominant “D” personality, I had to let her handle it, or I would go crazy stepping on his toys!

The beginning of Exodus is very systematic, and ends with even more structure. One can see how the Pharisees and Sadducees at the time of Christ had become legalistic in their religious thoughts. After construction from God’s instructions, Moses was very careful to follow him completely. Notice in Exodus 40 that Moses did everything “just as the LORD commanded,” six times. This obedience is significant because Moses is aware that he will not be able to go into the promised land with the people. His desire was to prepare them to enter the land with the tools to be successful in a land filled with paganism and idolatry. Moses thought more about his sheep than he did his own desires.

“So Moses finished the work” (40:33b). As I finish this final devotion in Exodus, I am thankful for the work that God gives me every day as I serve him. Take an inventory on what God has planned for you today and this week. Finish well.

# FEBRUARY 15

*Leviticus 1-6:7*



**W**E COMMONLY MAKE MISTAKES AS HUMANS, AND WHEN WE DO, WE MUST PAY BACK WHATEVER INDEBTEDNESS WE BEAR.

Leviticus begins with guidelines for worshiping God. The sacrificial system in ancient Israel provided a way to make things right for the person who committed transgressions against God and others.

Six offerings could be brought to the tabernacle altar. When worshipers wanted to express commitment to God, they brought the burnt offering, and possibly the grain or meal (*meat*) offering, and the drink offering. These offerings speak of total dedication to the Lord. The fellowship (*peace*) offering has to do with communion with God, and the sin offering and the guilt (*trespass*) offerings deal with cleansing from God. Each of these offerings met a specific need in the life of the worshiper and also expressed some truth about the person and work of Jesus Christ, God's perfect sacrifice.

The shedding of animal blood couldn't change a person's heart or take away sin (Hebrews 10:1-4). However, God did state that the sins of the worshiper were forgiven (Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7); and He did this on the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross (Hebrews 10:5-14).

Like some people in churches today, it would be easy to go through the motions at the altar, without putting their heart into it; but this meant that God had not truly forgiven them (Psalms 50:8-14; 51:16-17; Isaiah 1:10-20; Micah 6:6-8). God doesn't want our sacrifices; He wants obedience from our hearts (1 Samuel 15:22). The sacrifices described in Leviticus 1-6:7 remind us of the basic spiritual needs we have as God's people: commitment to God, communion with God, and cleansing from God.

# FEBRUARY 16

*Leviticus 6:8-7:38*



**T**HE PRIESTS HAD THE DAILY RESPONSIBILITY OF MAINTAINING THE ALTAR'S HOLY FIRES AND ENSURING A LAMB AS A WHOLE BURNT OFFERING WAS OFFERED EACH MORNING AND EVENING.

The offering was coupled with grain and drink offerings, which provided a pleasing aroma to the Lord. The aromas being pleasant indicated that the Lord accepted the offerings.

The perpetual burning of the altar's fires symbolized the perpetual need of sacrifice if the people were to enjoy the continued presence of the holy God in their midst. They were a continual demonstration of the people's worship of the living God who symbolically had taken up residence in the tent of meeting among his people.

As a burnt offering the animal was completely burned up, showing that the people dedicated themselves wholly to the service of the Lord. Since the offering was given to God, even the residual ashes from the roasting were considered holy.

The fat functioned as fuel to assist the burning process. Little or nothing was left to chance or human invention. Detailed instructions were given to the priests, telling us that the worship of God is not a casual matter. We witness God's grace in the offering by providing a perpetual flame, but in reality, the daily sacrifices were not sufficient since they had to be renewed each morning and evening.

These were a constant reminder that a permanent solution to human sin and ritual impurity was needed, and indicated the present arrangement was only temporary. A final deliverance was yet to come - the perfect sacrifice, our Lord Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross resulted in a complete removal of our sins and a final solution to our guilt in Hebrews 10:11-14.

# FEBRUARY 17

## Leviticus 8-9



**T**ODAY'S READING MARKS A CHANGE IN INSTRUCTION FROM HOLY WORSHIP TO HOLY LEADERSHIP - THE CONSECRATION OF LEADERSHIP.

Under the Old Covenant, God's people *had* a priesthood; under the New Covenant, God's people *are* a "holy priesthood" and a "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Every believer in Jesus Christ can say, "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Revelation 1:5-6)

God's desire was that the entire nation of Israel be "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6), but they failed him and became "a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity" (Isaiah 1:4). The nation decayed morally and spiritually because leaders failed to be holy and obedient as God commanded. At least twenty times in these chapters you'll find the word *commanded*. Moses and Aaron didn't have to concoct an ordination ceremony. God instructed Moses how to build the tabernacle, how to ordain the priests, and how they should serve in the tabernacle (Exodus 28-29).

Moses was to do everything according to what God had shown him on the mount. Nothing was left to chance or to imagination. One unique part of the ceremony was the putting of blood and oil on the right ear, right thumb, and right big toe of Aaron and his sons, symbolizing that they were set apart to hear God's voice, do God's work, and walk in God's ways. Bloodshed was necessary before God could accept Aaron and his sons as servants in his holy tabernacle.

Because He is the holy Son of God, Jesus Christ our high priest needed no such sacrifices (Hebrews 9). Instead, He is the one perfect sacrifice that "takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

# FEBRUARY 18

## *Leviticus 10*



**A** DAY WHICH SHOULD HAVE ENDED WITH THE GLORIOUS WORSHIP OF JEHOVAH GOD WAS INSTEAD ENDED WITH THE FUNERAL OF TWO OF AARON'S SONS, NADAB AND ABIHU.

They were the wrong people to be handling the incense and presenting it to the Lord. They used the wrong instruments, their own censers instead of the censer of the high priest, sanctified by the special anointing oil. They acted at the wrong time, for it was only on the annual Day of Atonement that the high priest was permitted to take incense into the holy of holies, and even then he had to submit to a special ritual. They acted under the wrong authority. In burning the incense, they used an “unauthorized fire.” Nadab and Abihu supplied their own fire, and God rejected it. They acted from the wrong motive and didn’t seek to glorify God alone (10:3).

You get the impression this was a willful act of pride. Their desire was not to sanctify and glorify the Lord but to promote themselves and be important.

Finally, they depended on the wrong energy. Verses 9–10 imply they were under the influence of alcohol. This reminds us of Ephesians 5:18, “And be not drunk with wine ... but be filled with the Spirit.”

If every Christian today was killed for not ministering in the power of the Spirit, not many would be left! At the beginning of a new era in salvation history, the Lord brought judgment to warn the people. The priestly ministry at the tabernacle was about to begin, and the Lord wanted to be sure the priests understood the seriousness of their work. It wasn’t enough for the priests merely to teach the people the difference between the holy and the unholy; they also had to practice it in their own lives.

# FEBRUARY 19

## *Leviticus 21-22*



**E**ACH ONE OF US IN SOME WAY HAS A LEADERSHIP FUNCTION.

Unlike the other chapters of Leviticus, these chapters are directed to the priests. Although many think of Leviticus as a book about religious leaders, it says more to the laity about proper worship practices than to the clergy. In essence in both chapters he commands the priestly leadership to maintain ritual and moral purity.

Since they represent the Lord as the intermediaries between God and the people, they must avoid any compromise in their conduct in religious and social matters as well as in personal moral purity. The spiritual survival of the people served was at stake. If the priests failed to obey the Lord and to represent God to the people or failed to represent the people to God in the proper manner, the ongoing spiritual vitality of the relationship between the Lord and his redeemed people was threatened. A holy God cannot be misrepresented to his people, and the people cannot depend on a priesthood that is ritually unclean and morally compromised.

Both chapters also cover the subject of sacrificial offerings. Priests officiated at the holy altar where the laity brought their offerings as “food offerings” to the Lord. These offerings were the layperson’s act of worship, whether in the case of dedication, thanksgiving, or forgiveness of sin. If the priest failed to render the proper procedure, the sacrifice was not acceptable because the offering had been polluted ritually. Prescriptions for the priests in our passage are of two kinds; instructions regarding the person and character of the priest, and the nature of the offerings that they oversaw at the altar.

The message is simple, avoid sacrilege and advocate holiness!



# FEBRUARY 20

## *Leviticus 11*



**G**OD GAVE ANCIENT ISRAEL A DESIGNATED LIST OF FOODS THAT WERE PERMISSIBLE FOR CONSUMPTION.

The food laws achieved two purposes for Israel. First, the dietary laws were tied to creation, indicating that the taking of created life was the Creator's province and prerogative. Second, the food laws distinguished Israel from the neighboring nations and made Israel uniquely the Lord's possession. By resisting the foods of the nations, the Israelites had a built-in safeguard against assimilation and taking up the religious life of pagan cultures.

A shared meal heightens a sense of community. *Unclean* was not the superficial dirt that an animal might bear, but a ritual category that had an underlying spiritual message. The teaching on holy living governed Israel's every behavior. There was no such thing as a secular versus a religious life in the Law. Everything was sacred under God's dominion. Paul expressed the same governing principle to his Corinthian readers: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

There is no more common and important feature than family and community meals. By virtue of the holy tent of meeting in the midst of Israel's tribal encampment, the people were obligated to be consecrated to God in their daily activities. Thus, the human condition and community practices were deemed either fitting for God (*clean*) or unfitting (*unclean*). Since the people participated in sacred meals, such as the peace offering in their homes, there was recognition that the holiness of the sanctuary was extended to the homes of the people. They and their homes must be ritually clean, and that included their diets.

# FEBRUARY 21

## *Leviticus 12-15*



**G**OD WAS CONCERNED ABOUT HIS PEOPLE'S PHYSICAL WELFARE - HEALTH ISSUES, BODILY FUNCTIONS AND VARIOUS INFIRMITIES.

He cared for their needs during their wilderness march (Deuteronomy 29:5), and if they obeyed him, He promised to shield them from the diseases they had seen in Egypt (Exodus 15:26; Deuteronomy 7:12-15). While it's true that our greatest needs are spiritual, God still has the physical well-being of his people at heart.

The Hebrew word translated leprosy in Leviticus 14-15 includes various skin diseases and even mildew (13:47ff; 14:33ff), but there is more to these chapters than a description of symptoms and ceremonies. Disease is one of the images of sin (Psalms 147:3; Isaiah 1:5-6; Jeremiah 8:2; 30:12; Mark 2:17). We can learn what sin is like and how God wants us to deal with it as we study these chapters.

We must look beyond Moses to Jesus Christ, the Great Physician, who was wounded that we might be healed (Isaiah 53:5). These regulations for personal sanctity were holy commandments from the Lord, and it was a serious thing to disobey them (15:31-33). For an unclean person to go to the tabernacle would be to defile the tabernacle and invite judgment (31). God warned the Israelites that violating the law given in Leviticus 15:24 would cause the couple to be "cut off from among their people" (20:18). Whether this meant death or excommunication, the penalty was serious.

God's people today don't live under the threat of such judgments, although "there is a sin unto death" (1 John 5:16; 1 Corinthians 11:30). But there should be no area in our lives from which God is excluded, and every relationship should be under his control. His words to us are still, "Be holy, for I am holy!"

# FEBRUARY 22

## *Leviticus 16-17*



**I**N THE CHRISTIAN CALENDAR, CHRISTMAS IS THE CHIEF DAY OF REMEMBRANCE.

In the Jewish calendar, Passover is the most important festal day - a memorial to the beginnings of Israel as a people when they were liberated from Egyptian bondage.

The most solemn day in the Jewish calendar is the Day of Atonement, known in Hebrew as Yom Kippur. This was a day on which the people “afflict[ed] yourselves” (29, 31) by acts of penance such as fasting. This day elicited both remorse for sins and a sense of relief at receiving forgiveness. The Day of Atonement is the ritual that best illustrates the theological teaching of Israel’s worship of its covenant Lord. It teaches the essentials for appropriate worship, which are what God demands of worshipers, the steps that God instructs the Israelites to perform so their worship is acceptable, and the spiritual benefits that worship brings to the people. It is the theological message portrayed through the rites performed the template for understanding the message of Christianity.

The centerpiece of Christianity is the cross where Jesus’ death resulted in the forgiveness of sins through the shedding of his blood for all who repent and express faith in Christ as Savior. The rituals that happened on the Day of Atonement provided an explanation through “moving pictures” of what happened in God’s eyes when Jesus died at Mount Calvary. Chapter 17 shares why the sacrifices are effective for atoning the sins of the people.

Verse 11 explains why sacrifice provides the avenue for continued life with God. “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.”

# FEBRUARY 23

## *Leviticus 18*



**R**EPEATEDLY GOD DECLARES, “I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD” AND “I AM THE LORD,” ASSERTING THE AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE OF THE INSTRUCTIONS.

The Lord gives clear instructions concerning personal sexual hygiene, sexual morality, and marriage. We’re created in the image of God, and the Creator knows what’s best for his creation. God certainly wants married couples to enjoy the beautiful gift of sex, but He also wants them to avoid the terrible consequences when his laws are violated. God had chosen Israel to be the channel through which his Son would come into the world, and it was important that the channel be sanctified.

The basis for moral teachings and lifestyle is the commandments of our Lord, not social-economic studies or the findings of genetic studies. We worship God, and this means submitting ourselves to his ways. God is Creator. He has chosen to run the world as he sees fit. To deny him that in our lives is the most violent act of disobedience.

The New Testament recognizes that sexual immorality is a characteristic of a person unfit for the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21) The prohibitions in verses 6–23 concern sexual relationships with close relatives and sexual relations that are not exclusively between a man and a woman. “Uncover the nakedness” is a polite way of saying sexual relations. Prohibitions also include homosexuality and bestiality (22, 23). It’s hard to believe human sacrifice and bestiality are actually occurring. Although probably rare, it was a reality the Israelites had to face. More acceptable in our culture is the sexual lifestyle of the gay community. Nevertheless, the Scriptures are clear that such sexual relationships were unacceptable. The language that condemned it is strongly worded; it is deemed “an abomination” (22).

# FEBRUARY 24

## *Leviticus 19*



**G**OD EXPECTED HIS PEOPLE TO TAKE HIS LAW SERIOUSLY AND TO APPLY THE PENALTIES OBEDIENTLY AND WITHOUT FAVORITISM.

The regulations given in chapter 19 are related to the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17), which is the basis for all Jewish law and should be the basis for all moral law.

**Precepts relating to God:** Since He is a holy God, we must be a holy people. The law brings sinful people into the presence of a sovereign God who has every right to tell us right and wrong. Honoring the Sabbath reminded them of the fourth commandment (Ex. 20:8–11). The law against idolatry focuses on both the first and second commandments (Exodus 20:2–6). Leviticus 19:5–8 emphasizes the importance of following God’s instructions for worship. Verses 19:27–28 are prohibitions against imitating the practices of unbelievers. The name of the Lord (12) is sacred and must never be used blasphemously or in an oath with no intention of fulfilling.

**Precepts relating to others:** These cover respect for one’s parents and the aged. God is also concerned for those with physical handicaps and strangers in our midst. Sexual morality is demanded. God’s concern for the poor and needy is seen in the “harvest laws.” Respect for truth and property is the foundation for a just and orderly society.

**Precepts relating to things:** The strange regulation in Leviticus 19:19 prohibits imitating practices related to heathen worship, or, it may simply be a reminder that Israel is a separated people. God is concerned about ecology. Fruit, of course, can’t be “circumcised”; the word simply means “forbidden.” By the fourth year, the fruit would be more mature, since it would be the third crop since planting; this belonged to God. The firstfruits should always be his (Proverbs 3:9–10).

# FEBRUARY 25

## *Leviticus 20*



**T**HE SAME LORD WHO DECLARED THE PRECEPTS  
ALSO DECLARED THE PENALTIES.

Fifteen offenses in Israel were capital crimes: striking or cursing a parent (Exodus 21:15, 17), breaking the Sabbath (31:14), blaspheming God (Leviticus 24:10–16), occult practices (Exodus 22:18), prophesying falsely (Deuteronomy 13:1–5), adultery (Leviticus 20:10), rape (Deuteronomy 22:25), sexual relations before marriage (vv. 13ff), incest (Leviticus 20:11–12), homosexuality (v. 13), bestiality (vv. 15–16), kidnapping (Exodus 21:16), idolatry (Leviticus 20:1–5), false witness in a case involving a capital crime (Deuteronomy 19:16–21), and killing a human intentionally (Exodus 21:12).

Israelites were the covenant people of God. The Law of God was the law of the land. God gave his law to restrain sin, not to reform sinners; the penalties He imposed were for the purpose of upholding his law, not improving the offenders. The Jews usually stoned capital offenders to death (Leviticus 20:2; Deuteronomy 13:10), but Leviticus 20:14 and 21:9 speak of offenders burned with fire.

The phrase “cut off” means to kill (20:3, 5–6, 17–18) or expulsion from the camp and the loss of all covenant privileges. Some offenders God inflicted with childlessness (20–21), and of others He said, “They shall bear their iniquity” (19). The god of the Ammonites’ metal image was heated, and little children were placed in his arms and burned to death. People who practiced such idolatry were an abomination. Their presence in the camp defiled God’s sanctuary and profaned his holy name. Idolaters were not tolerated because they influenced and led others away from worshiping the true God.

This chapter closes with another reminder that the sins of the people can defile the land (20:22–27).

# FEBRUARY 26

## *Leviticus 23*



**C**ALENDARS ARE A NORMAL PART OF OUR MODERN BUSY WORLD, BUT THEY WEREN'T THAT IMPORTANT TO THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL IN MOSES' DAY.

The Jews worked from sunrise to sunset, counted the months by the phases of the moon, and watched the seasons come and go. God had promised them “seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night” (Genesis 8:22), and they were content. Each day was a sacred gift from God.

God gives Israel a calendar tied to the rhythm of the seasons and the history of the nation. It was an unusual calendar because it not only summarized what God had done for them in the past, but it anticipated what God would do for them in the future. The salvation work of Jesus Christ, the founding of the church, and the future of the people of Israel are all illustrated in these seven feasts.

In this chapter, these special days are called “feasts” nine times and “holy convocations” ten times. “Feasts” have nothing to do with eating. In fact, on the Day of Atonement, the people fasted. “Convocation” gives the idea that all the people met together as a congregation, but this also was not true. There were special gatherings, but the word basically means “proclamation” or “announcement.” The Lord “appointed and announced” these events, which the people faithfully had to celebrate. Each year, the grown males of the nation had to appear before God to celebrate three specific feasts: Passover and Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, and Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14–19).

These three feasts remind us of the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, and the return of Christ to establish his kingdom. Christ died for our sins. Christ lives. Christ is coming again!

# FEBRUARY 27

## *Leviticus 24*



**T**HE LORD GAVE MOSES INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING THREE HOLY THINGS: THE HOLY OIL FOR THE LAMPSTAND, THE HOLY BREAD FOR THE TABLE, AND THE HOLY NAME OF THE LORD.

Our passage brings together two images derived from the tent of meeting and a narrative that depicts a disturbing incident of blasphemy against the sacred name of God. These three speak to the character and importance of God's presence for us.

The Feast of Weeks (or Pentecost) and the Feast of Booths recognized God's provision of the seasonal harvests, the grain harvest in the spring and the fruit and olive harvest in the autumn months.

The golden lampstand and gold table of the bread of the Presence were fixtures in God's home. The olive oil derived from the autumn olive ingathering was necessary for the fueling of the lampstand in the tent of meeting and for the anointing oil for the priests and the holy sanctuary. The bread of the Presence consisted of baked loaves of grain that was derived from the wheat harvest and was remembered during the weeklong celebration of the Feast of Weeks. These two images, the light and the bread, tell us about the sanctity of God's presence. This chapter begins in the holy place of the tabernacle and ends outside the camp. It opens with oil and bread and closes with the shedding of guilty blood. But the emphasis is the same: Our God is a holy God and we must honor him, whether in bringing our gifts or respecting his name.

The Lord doesn't execute blasphemers today, but there is coming a day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts will be revealed, and then God will "render to every man according to his deeds" (Romans 2:6).



# FEBRUARY 28

## *Leviticus 25-27*



**I**F THE ISRAELITES WERE TO POSSESS AND ENJOY THEIR LAND, THEY HAD TO RESPECT THAT GOD OWNED THE LAND (LEVITICUS 25:2, 23, 38).

God owned the people, too (v. 55). After all, He had redeemed them from Egyptian bondage. The Jews were not to take advantage of one another when it came to debts or property claims (vv. 25, 35–38).

The Jews were expected to toil in their fields, but it was God who gave the increase (v. 21) and supplied them with sunshine, rain, and harvests. They had God as their “land Lord.” God was also in control of the calendar. The spiritual emancipation that the sabbatical year and the Year of Jubilee foreshadowed was the hope of a final liberty from sin and death through the perfect liberator, Jesus Christ, God’s Son.

The Lord sets before the Jews the choice between obedience and disobedience, but reveals they will ultimately choose disobedience, which will result in eventual exile from the land. God was right. Although deserving final annihilation, the Lord promised that the people would repent and be restored to their land, and the blessings of God would flow once again. God’s faithfulness to his promises incites him to show grace to the repentant. God will change their hearts and restore them.

Leviticus closes on the subject of making and fulfilling vows to the Lord because the whole book is about promises that God made to his people. God was faithful to his vow, so the question arises, are you fulfilling your pledge to God? Vow offerings were gifts to the Lord at completion of a vow made to the Lord, often given in thanksgiving to God for deliverance (e.g., Psalm 56:12). This chapter contains a message we need to hear because of the ready temptation to renegotiate our commitments to God. May we dedicate our lives and our possessions to the service of the Lord.

# MARCH 1

## *Numbers 1-4*



**N**UMBERS IS ROOTED IN THE TWO CENSUSES MOSES RECORDED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE BOOK AND NEAR THE END.

The Israelites traveled from Mt. Sinai to Moab, east of Jericho and across the Jordan River. They went from Sinai to Kadesh Barnea on the south end of Canaan, but didn't go in because of their unbelief. Numbers focuses on the death of the older, faithless generation who died in the wilderness. There is also a focus on the younger generation and their entrance into the Promised Land. God is faithful in relating to and loving his people. He provided for his people and promised them a land "flowing with milk and honey" (Numbers 14:8).

The first numbering was of the men of war, completed in response to the command of God. The men twenty years and older were numbered, which identified an army of 603,550. God had raised up the nation to carry out his will for the world. The Levites were set aside to serve God (1:47) and oversee the tabernacle of the testimony. They were also to transport the tabernacle when the campsite of the Israelites moved.

The camps were organized "under the respective banners beside the flags of their ancestral homes (2:2)." First born males one month or older were registered (3:40). God is the God of incredible order. His sovereignty relates to even the smallest details of life. God can be trusted and He should be obeyed. Even when we do not fully understand the purpose of what his Word directs us to do, we trust him because He is faithfully guiding our lives!

Father God, you are the God of order and details. Teach us to trust you in all things, and to understand and follow your will in our lives.

# MARCH 2

## *Numbers 5-9*



**G**OD GAVE LAWS TO THE NATION OF ISRAEL FOR THEIR OWN GOOD, TO REFLECT HIS HOLINESS.

Israel was preparing to leave Sinai on their way to the Promised Land. The Holy God made his dwelling place in the center of the camp. The cloud stood over the tabernacle. The people were to maintain a good relationship with God and with one another.

Sin is first against God (5:6-7). Because He is holy, when we sin we offend him. As children of God, sin does not sever our relationship with God, but it does hinder fellowship. We need to stay close to God, sensitive to his leading and conviction. When we do wrong, we should repent and confess the sins that we have committed and make right the wrongs so our relationships with others are not hindered either.

The blessing of God upon his people was given to Moses: “Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, the LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. So shall they put my name upon the people or Israel, and I will bless them” (6:23-27).

When the tabernacle was consecrated, offerings were brought. The Passover was celebrated. All of it pointed to the grace of God in dealing with his people and watching over and caring for them.

Holy God, you have made your dwelling place among man. Your care for your people is intimate, and your love is infinite. Help us to live repentant lives, mindful of the need to live close to you, led by your Spirit.

# MARCH 3

## *Numbers 10*



**A**S THE NATION PREPARED TO DEPART FROM MT. SINAI, THEY WERE STRONG SPIRITUALLY, HAVING RECEIVED THE LAW AND COMMITTED TO FOLLOW GOD FAITHFULLY.

God instructed the priests to announce with two silver trumpets, the beginning of the journey toward the Promised Land. To the farthest camp, they would hear the call.

The people broke camp and began their journey as God commanded them. The tabernacle was of central importance. Moses had a key role as intercessor for the people of God. Two prayers are recorded in this section, first when the cloud moved and the second when it came to rest.

“Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say: Arise, LORD! Let Your enemies be scattered, and those who hate You flee from Your presence.” (35).

“When it came to rest, he would say: Return, LORD, to the countless thousands of Israel” (36).

Intercessor was a role that Moses fulfilled faithfully. He cared for the people, and often asked God for his grace and mercy on their behalf. His leadership was saturated with prayer and is a good example for us. He said to Hobab, son of Moses’ father-in-law Reuel the Midianite, “‘We’re setting out for the place the LORD promised: ‘I will give it to you.’ Come with us, and we will treat you well, for the LORD has promised good things to Israel’” (29)

Gracious Father, thank you for the reminders you have given to us in your Word, that you are the Lord our God. You can be trusted, and you are to be obeyed. Teach us to pray like Moses did, in dependence on you, regardless of the circumstances we are facing.

# MARCH 4

## *Numbers 11*



**T**HE CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 10 RECORDS THE HIGH MARK OF THE BOOK OF NUMBERS. DECLINE SET IN AFTER THIS, ULTIMATELY, RESULTING IN GOD'S JUDGMENT FOR THE NATION.

Their deliverance into the Promised Land was delayed and the older generation passed away after wandering in the wilderness for 38 years.

God sends a warning to the people for their ingratitude by sending fire to the outskirts of the camp. The people saw the warning from God and appealed to Moses, who interceded on their behalf. Some non-Israelites came out of Egypt when the people of God were delivered. They began to complain about what God was providing in the wilderness. The grumbling spread to the Israelites.

Moses as the intercessor was caught in between. The people were being rebellious, and God was angry because of their behavior. God graciously provided meat for them to eat, giving them what they requested. Yet he sent an oversupply and permitted them to get sick from the meat. This was God's discipline on the people.

Be careful when things are going well and you are at a high point spiritually. It is easy to take the blessings of God for granted. Ingratitude is a deadly disease that can be infectious, affecting not only those who express it, but everyone in their midst. A church and its people should be very careful to not get caught up in this cycle. Be careful what you wish for. God may very well grant it, but in the form of judgment and not blessings. Seek God's best for your life.

God, teach us to be cautious when things are going well, to keep our eyes on you. Help us to have an attitude of gratitude that recognizes how richly you have blessed us. Protect us from asking for things that are selfish and unhelpful in our lives.

# MARCH 5

## *Numbers 12*



**E**NVY IS DANGEROUS AND DESTRUCTIVE IN THE WORLD, AND AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE.

God chose Moses and raised him up. He married a woman from Cush, in upper Egypt, in the region of Ethiopia. We can assume Zipporah had died most likely from old age, and this was a remarriage.

The Bible indicates Moses was humble, more than anyone else on the face of the earth. God spoke directly to him as his chosen leader. Miriam was known as the prophetess in Israel; Aaron was the high priest. God had also chosen 70 elders to serve as leaders.

Miriam was dissatisfied with her role and questioned Moses' leadership. God was angry with Miriam, and struck her with leprosy - her skin became as white as snow. Aaron was in on it too, but turned to Moses to plead for mercy. Moses interceded on their behalf! He did not react to the testing in anger. Miriam was set outside the camp for seven days, delaying the people in their journey until she returned.

Leaders should not take this out of context and demand people follow them as the "chosen" of God. We are not Moses, nor do we receive direct divine revelation as Moses. We *have* received the Word of God which is sufficient for everything we need. Moses' posture toward God impacted his posture toward people. When we serve the Lord as a leader, if God has called us, we have been chosen by God to carry out his will. We must stay close to the Lord, and be faithful to his call on our lives. When wronged, do not react in anger, but go to God in prayer.

Lord, help us to avoid envy, and to trust God-called leadership. When we encounter difficulties and testing, may we turn to you and pray. You are the one who chooses people to lead your people, and we trust in you.

# MARCH 6

*Numbers 13-14*



**T**HE PEOPLE CAME TO KADESH AND GOD TOLD THEM TO GO UP AND TAKE POSSESSION OF THE LAND HE HAD PROMISED THEM (13:1-2).

Instead of moving forward, the people asked if they could send spies ahead of them, to scout the area and bring back word. Moses permitted it and twelve spies went out and surveyed a massive area.

The spies returned with a report of the land flowing with milk and honey. It is important to note they were not sent to determine the viability of taking the land. They were sent to identify the path to be taken. They came back with a message that there were giants in the land (13:33) and indicated the barriers were insurmountable.

God had shown his great power. They should have had faith that He could overcome any barrier. Only Caleb and Joshua came back with a faith report. The congregation rejected what they had to say. God threatened to wipe the people out for failure of unbelief. Again, Moses interceded for the people. Everyone above 20 years old would end up dying in the wilderness for their lack of faith (14:29).

If we fail to trust God, we will suffer the consequences of disobedience. Only the faithful will receive the rewards of obedience. God disciplined the people and they did not receive the discipline well either. God sent the people, but the people short circuited his sending by sending people on their own to scout the destination. This was the beginning of the problem. It is always better to obey rather than to question.

Lord, help us to believe and obey. You can be trusted, and your Word is always faithful. Instill in us a heart of faith that trusts you in all things. You know the beginning, the middle, and the end. May your glory be our focus.

# MARCH 7

*Numbers 15-19*



**G**OD COMMUNICATED THE LAW TO MOSES. IT WAS INTENDED TO REVEAL THE CHARACTER OF GOD, AND HIS HOLINESS, BUT THE PEOPLE INCREASINGLY GREW IN THEIR DISOBEDIENCE.

A key event took place when a rebellion arose led by Korah, a Levite of the Kohathite tribe, kin of Moses and Aaron. He was joined in the rebellion by 250 other leaders.

Moses and Aaron were charged with personal ambition and their motives were judged. Moses was distressed by their challenge, and humbled himself and went to God in prayer. Moses told them, "In the morning the LORD will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him" (16:5). Moses called them all together, so they assembled at the entrance of the tent of meeting. "The glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation" (16:19).

God told Moses and Aaron to separate themselves from the congregation because He was going to consume them, but they appealed to God. He told them to tell the congregation to get away from the men who rebelled. "And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly ..." (16:31-35). God's character is a serious matter. The circumstance with this rebellion serve as a warning to us all to take it seriously as well.

Lord, your character is the measure of holiness. Your Word is true in every regard. May we not take your glory lightly or presume that we know better than you.



# MARCH 8

## *Numbers 20*



**M**OSES EXPERIENCED THE JUDGMENT OF GOD FOR DISOBEYING AND NOT BELIEVING GOD.

He certainly believed God could provide water for the people, but apparently didn't think simply obeying God was good enough. He took things into his own hands. Instead of speaking to the rock, Moses struck the rock twice, giving the people the impression he had done something to bring about the supply of water.

The anger of Moses toward the people compounded the problem. God judged Moses in that Moses would not be able to lead the nation into the Promised Land. He could see it but not enter. The lesson here is clear. Those who lead God's people lose their authority to lead when they stop relying on God and hinder his work. Moses was harsh toward the people, took credit for what God had actually done, was resentful, lost his composure, and disobeyed God.

Aaron was guilty as well. He could have stopped Moses. The water was called "Meribah" (contention), which was also the place where it happened. In spite of the disobedience of one man, God still provided for his people.

Aaron subsequently died and a dark period was concluded. Even the best of the people are hindered at times in their flesh by sin. It is so easy to operate from the flesh rather than fully trusting in God in obedience. Obeying God, just as He has instructed, is always the best course of action. When we fail to, we will suffer the consequences.

Almighty God, you are to be obeyed in all things. Grant us faith that we may trust in you, and not question you. Help us to follow what you have commanded swiftly, and with all of our hearts.

# MARCH 9

## *Numbers 21*



**I**F WE FAIL TO LOOK TO GOD, WE CAN BE OVERCOME BY THE ENEMY.

The Israelites traveled “the way of the Red Sea” (4) and began to grumble again. The Lord sent fiery serpents among them as discipline. The people in turn confessed their sin and asked Moses to intercede so the LORD would remove the serpents.

God told Moses to make a snake image and mount it on a pole. Anyone who was bitten and looked at it would recover. So he followed God’s instruction and many were spared. Interestingly, Jesus identified the symbol as a type of himself (John 3:14). Christ would bring ultimate salvation and victory for all who look to him in faith.

Israel continued their journey. Moses made a request to pass through the territory of Sihon and into the Promised Land (21:21-32). Sihon attacked Israel and Israel defeated them. They moved their camp from Mt. Pisgah to the west and to the north to the plains of Moab (21:20). The people would stay there until they crossed over the Jordan with Joshua as their leader.

The circumstance of fiery serpents is a powerful one. The world, the flesh, and the devil come against us to draw our affections and attention away from God. Our only hope is to look to him for deliverance. This is especially true when it comes to the ultimate deliverance of salvation in Jesus. There is no other place to look. All who look to Jesus for salvation will be delivered from the enemy, delivered from hell, and delivered to the savior and to heaven.

Lord, help us to look to you as our hope. There is no other place to look. Jesus is our deliverer and our deliverance. Thank you, Father, for rescuing your people, and extending grace and mercy that is undeserved.

# MARCH 10

## *Numbers 22-24*



**F**OR A TIME, THE MOABITES DID NOT ATTACK ISRAEL AS ISRAEL MOVED NORTH ALONG THEIR BORDER. INSTEAD, THEY SOLD THEM SUPPLIES.

However, Israel's victories over the Amorite kings gave Balak the king of Moab fear. He sent messengers to Balaam, a magician of sorts, to get him to curse the Israelites, and promised to pay Balaam for bringing evil upon the Hebrews. The Israelites were unaware.

It is thought that Balaam's name came from a Hebrew root word meaning destroyer. The Old Testament does not refer to Balaam as a prophet, but as a diviner or soothsayer, which was prohibited by God. It is interesting that the Bible also indicates Balaam knew Yahweh and received revelations from him (22:8, 13, 18-20).

God came to Balaam, telling him not to curse the Israelites. Balaam sent the messengers of the kin away, but then he went with the second group of messengers after the warning of God had come. On the way, Balaam's donkey saw the Angel of God with a sword drawn. The donkey turned, and was beaten by Balaam. The second time, the donkey pressed against the wall, crushing Balaam's foot, and he beat the donkey again. The donkey saw the angel a third time and laid down under Balaam who beat her severely.

The Lord caused the donkey to speak, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times" (22:28)? God opened Balaam's eyes so he could see the angel. The angel ordered him to go to Balak, but only speak what God had instructed. God announced through Balaam that he would bless Israel and fulfill the promises he had made to them.

Lord, when you direct, help me to listen. Protect me from making selfishly motivated decisions for ill-gotten gain. May I honor you in all my decisions and speak words of blessing and not of cursing.

# MARCH 11

*Numbers 25*



**T**HE MOABITES AND MIDIANITES WORKED TOGETHER TO LEAD THE ISRAELITES ASTRAY. IT WOULD LEAD TO A GREAT SPIRITUAL APOSTASY.

The objective of cursing Israel failed, so they made a second attempt. The Moabites influenced them toward idolatry. Israel aligned itself with Baal of Peor, and God's anger burned against them.

The whole nation had sinned, and God sent punishment on their leaders who should have prevented the evil among the people. They brought them out in broad daylight and executed all who had aligned themselves with Baal or Peor. To make matters worse, they began to intermix with the Midianites, which God had said not to do. Phineas, son of Eleazar, saw what was happening and brought death to an Israelite man and a Midianite woman among them. The plague on the Israelites brought death to a total of 24,000 people.

The LORD told Moses to strike the Midianites dead for what they had done. God has always taken idolatry seriously. His Word is clear that an idol is anything that replaces the one, true God. God's covenant with his people was based on exclusive worship of him alone. They were not even to mention the false gods.

Idolatry is alive today. They are subtle and draw our attention away from God. Modern idols tend to be people, pleasure, power, and possessions. They seem satisfying for a time, but always lead a person away from God. There are consequences for exchanging the glory of God for any substitute. We must be careful because anyone or anything can become an idol if we love it more than we love the Lord.

Lord, you alone are worthy of my allegiance and my affections. Protect me from cheap substitutes that will lead to disappointment and destruction. Guide my life so I worship you alone.

# MARCH 12

## *Numbers 26*



**G**OD IS ALWAYS FAITHFUL TO DO WHAT HE SAYS  
HE WILL DO.

Approximately 38 years earlier, at Mt. Sinai, God commanded a census be taken. Both censuses, first and second, were for the organization of the military. The total number of men were 601,730.

Everything God does is with purpose. He was continuing to direct the younger generation toward the Promised Land. The larger tribes would get larger inheritances, and the smaller tribes would receive smaller inheritances. This would be in fulfillment of what God had assured them of long before.

God would fulfill his promises even though the people had failed him. The focus was shifting from the older generation that was doomed to die in the wilderness, to the younger generation who would enter the Promised Land. The chapter closes with a testimony to the faithfulness of God. Everyone but Caleb and Joshua died in the wilderness as God had promised.

Unbelief, disobedience, distraction, confusion, or complaining cannot cause God to waver on what he has promised. However, we cannot think that we can do as we please with no consequences. All along their journey, there were occurrences of disobedience. Each time, God dealt with it directly, and each time it pointed to God's glory and purpose in their lives. These serve as warnings and instructions for his people today. God is to be believed, obeyed, focused on, and given thanksgiving because he is worthy.

Father God, you are the ultimate promise keeper. Even when we are faithless, you remain faithful. You are to be honored in all things as the one who never changes, or wavers. Thank you for your consistent faithfulness to your people and to your purposes.

# MARCH 13

*Numbers 27-30*



**G**OD MADE IT CLEAR MOSES WOULD DIE WITHOUT ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND, BUT HE GRACIOUSLY PERMITTED MOSES TO SEE IT FROM MT. NEBO.

Moses prayed for the wellbeing of Israel and asked God to select his successor. He knew God was sovereign over Israel and would accomplish his purposes. Moses laid hands on Joshua, which was symbolic of the passing of the mantle. Joshua served with Moses, and under him, until Moses died (27:20).

Another step in preparing to enter the Promised Land was to organize all of the sacrifices God required the priests to prepare during the year. Chapters 28-29 record the sacrifices to be offered for the nation as a whole. These pointed to maintaining fellowship with God - they were to consistently worship God and stay close to him.

Sacrifices were to be made daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly. Every day was a day of worship to God. While we do not offer sacrifices today in the Old Testament sense, every day is worship and sacrifice unto the Lord. How a person serves their family, church family, vocation, and the world are all part of worship to God.

Vows of commitment to God were usually accompanied by outward signs of commitment. Vows were to be undertaken carefully, and lived out with sincerity. Obedience is always better than simply making a vow.

Almighty God, you are guiding your plan toward its desired end. I trust in you, that you know best. Each of us are temporary servants in your kingdom and none of us are irreplaceable. We are helpful and useful in your kingdom when we obediently carry out your will, for your glory.

# MARCH 14

*Numbers 31-36*



**D**ETAILS MATTER. THEY SPEAK OF GOD WHO DOES THINGS WITH INCREDIBLE CARE AND CONCERN, AND DETAIL.

In these closing chapters, God instructed vengeance to be taken on the Midianites. Moses gave the people instructions on what to do. They warred against Midian and were overwhelmingly victorious. Part of God's people began to settle on one side of the Jordan.

Chapter 33 recounts their journeys and instructions were given to Israel to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan. God told them to take possession of the land and settle in it, because he had given them the land. He warned them if they did not drive out the inhabitants of the land, then those who remained would be barbs in their eyes and thorns in their sides. This would prove true in the future. They only partially obeyed God and instead tried to assimilate many of the people in their midst. There is much to be learned here. Partial obedience is always disobedience.

In chapter 34 God also made clear what the boundaries of the land were to be - a reminder of the inheritance God was delivering. The list of the tribal heads are outlined in preparation for going into the land. Cities were promised to the Levites and cities of refuge were outlined. The people were to follow carefully prescribed rules, given by God, for managing the inheritance (36:13).

God does nothing without a purpose or a reason. When we read this book we should see how great our God is!

Father God, partial obedience to you, is still disobedience. Teach me to heed your word, obey it, and follow your commandments. Your will is always best, and it is always right. Empower me to walk in it.

# MARCH 15

## *Numbers Conclusion*



**T**HE MESSAGE OF NUMBERS IS TIMELESS. IT REMINDS US OF THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE WE ARE ENGAGED IN AS FOLLOWERS OF GOD.

Numbers serves to bridge the time between giving of the law and preparations to enter the Promised Land. It's a story of God building and preparing Israel as the chosen people. God blesses his people and magnifies his mercy throughout several themes.

**The holiness and glory of God:** He stands alone as the one who defines what true holiness is. The holiness of God is matchless. These characteristics are shown clearly in God's instructions to his people.

**The judgment of God on sin and disobedience:** If God did not deal with sin and disobedience, it would be inconsistent with his character and holiness. He does so consistently and directly.

**The righteousness God grants through mercy and grace:** God demands holiness, but in our own strength, it is impossible to achieve. God grants his holiness and righteousness through faith in his son, Jesus Christ. This is the hope of the gospel in life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

**The importance of obedience:** Your obedience to God's commands is significant. Obedience brings blessing; disobedience brings consequences. God makes the pathways clear and it is ultimately our responsibility to walk in them.

Nothing can thwart the purposes of God. It is our privilege to be a part of God's plan for the ages.

"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace" (Numbers 6:24-36).



# MARCH 16

*Deuteronomy 1:1-18*



**R**EPETITION IS THE MOTHER OF ALL LEARNING.  
REPETITION IS THE MOTHER OF ALL LEARNING.  
REPETITION ... I THINK YOU GET THE CONCEPT.

One form of repetition is a formal review. In business this can be an interview with human resources personnel, a peer review where a board of equals walks through your quarter, six months, year's output, or a self-evaluation where a supervisor merely signs off. For some companies, the formal review is done strictly to obey policy and amounts to no more than a formality. In other organizations, your tenure or your promotion might hinge on how the review goes.

Moses begins Deuteronomy by recounting how the Hebrew people came to this point in their pilgrimage; this is normal for an oral society where few were literate. He takes time to recount highs and lows, where God has intervened, and where the people fell short. In our *now* society, drowning in data, we often fail to account for our heritage, and how we arrived at our starting point. Moses took time to show not only how his people had arrived at this point, but where they had succeeded and where they had unabashedly blown it. John 16 describes the role of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of both righteousness and judgment. The Bible writers use repetition of past exploits and adventures to instruct and show where God has been faithful to his covenant, and usually where his people have not.

This writer has journaled for over forty years and repeatedly reviews past entries to gain a better perspective on what God is doing in his life. What would a review of your last forty days, months, or years yield concerning how God has dealt with you?

# MARCH 17

*Deuteronomy 1:19-46*



**M**OSES PAINFULLY REMINDS HIS PEOPLE WHY THEY SPENT INORDINATE YEARS IN A NOMADIC EXISTENCE AFTER LEAVING EGYPT.

Early in their Sinai peninsula journeys, the Hebrews were presented with an opportunity to conquer the land promised to them (19-25). They chose to emphasize circumstances instead of God's promises, refusing to venture forth and claim what God offered (26-33).

This is a sad, indeed, but Moses saves his strongest wording to describe what happens when *now* becomes *too late*. After God says none of the protesting generation will enter the Promised Land, save Joshua and Caleb, everyone says, "Well, let us go, then, and take the land." "Whoa, not so fast," says God, "You had your chance, and it has expired" (34-40). The passage is not overly dramatic, but the resulting drama cannot be overstated. Instead of entering into God's reward, the entire group wanders in the desert for more years until the entire generation perishes. The window of opportunity had shut, and there was no handle on the Hebrew side (41-46).

It is understandable to forego a challenge because of weakened physical prowess or mental acuity due to age; it is another thing to refuse a challenge out of fear that manifests itself in excuses, or twisted, rationalized logic.

God's grace and love are eternal, but the offer to partake of them has an expiration date. One can argue that extra years in the desert hardened the Hebrews into a fighting force, and helped them forge a stronger identity, but the denied entry into a promised land hung over them for decades. I pray if I am passed over for an opportunity, it will be because of diminished ability or deficient talent, but not disobedience.

# MARCH 18

## *Deuteronomy 2-3*



**A**RE WE THERE YET?" HAS DRIVEN MANY A PARENT TO ANGER OR DESPAIR.

It is met with a simple "no," to "we'll get there when we get there," to "don't ever ask that question again," to "let's sing a song." In modern times travelers can easily see when they cross state borders or city limits or approach a destination such as Disney World. Signs abound, and our smartphones tell us periodically how many more miles till our journey is ended (we'll get there when Siri says so).

However, I sincerely doubt there were any erected signs greeting the Hebrew wanderers with "Welcome to the Promised Land!" In Deuteronomy 2-3, the portable nation of God's people encounter the lands of Edom, Moab, and Ammon. The Lord directed them to avoid conflict with some inhabitants and openly encouraged it with others. They were never quite sure if the next village, the next hill, the next valley was the Promised Land or an ante-region to it. They just knew they had to go where the Lord directed and do what he commanded.

The process of sanctification is messy and uncertain most of the time. We have to slog through another day, fight another battle - most of the time we have trouble knowing if we have gained ground or lost it. Paul didn't know on his first missionary journey how many more he would make; when the stones were hurled or the lash unfurled, he just knew he had to go to the next city and preach the gospel. Patient faithfulness in the midst of the task at hand can help you navigate the next Edom, Moab, or Ammon. Until the Lord gives the signal otherwise, keep the suitcases packed and the caravan moving.

# MARCH 19

## *Deuteronomy 4*



**A**N OFT REPEATED TERM IN DEUTERONOMY IS “COVENANT” (27 TIMES IN THE ESV).

As this devotional was written, many ongoing conflicts dotted the globe, some ongoing for decades. As political and military fortunes wax and wane, governments and opposition groups often enter negotiations for various reasons, and are usually made difficult by the fact each side is jockeying for maximum leverage and advantage. Whatever agreement is forged is at best a compromise because each side bartered and traded something they didn’t want in order to gain something they did want. Although the pact is reached after lengthy bargaining sessions, it is often easily undone by a new administration, a shift in an alliance, or an unforeseen circumstance.

The covenant of God in Deuteronomy is not a contract produced by protracted consultations between parties. It is essentially a unilateral offer by God to give us what we never deserved and never will: his faithful provision, love, eternal presence, and invitation to abide with him forever. No negotiation, just invitation. He has chosen us, and it is our individual and corporate decision whether or not to accept that invitation.

In the C.S. Lewis fantasy, “The Great Divorce,” beings of light come “from afar” to offer beings “from below” a chance to experience life as never before imagined in their land. Dialogues follow between these beings and the ones “from below,” arguing and posturing, requiring this or that pre-condition to gain their acceptance. It is at times comical and mostly tragic as the spectrum of human frailty is so starkly revealed. Whether in marriage or in church (God’s bride), we need to view our relationship to each other or to our God, not as a negotiated contract, but a gracious covenant.

# MARCH 20

## *Deuteronomy 5*



**T**HIS SEEMS TO BE THE ERA OF DESIGNER TRUTHS AND VALUES. GODLY STANDARDS UPON WHICH SOCIETY SHOULD BE BASED IS EASILY DISMISSED.

In Deuteronomy 5, Moses reminds the people of their covenant they entered into at Horeb by reciting the Ten Commandments God first gave them in Exodus 20. In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus summarized the ten into two as he admonishes us to love God supremely and to then love our neighbor as ourselves (see also Deuteronomy 6:5 and 10:12).

In both instances, two perspectives are shared. One is the vertical relationship we have with God. The first four commandments deal with that vertical relationship. The last six commandments deal with the horizontal relationship, men and women to each other. (I'm not sure if the depravity of mankind necessitated the majority of the commandments deal with it, but I digress.)

In today's society many of the commandments are ignored, willingly flouted, and openly ridiculed as antiquated and restrictive. These ten statements are not the ten discussion questions, nor ten suggestions; they are the Ten Commandments. One day mankind will realize it cannot dissolve, laugh, or satirize these commandments away, but will rather be broken by them as all lives are measured against them by the righteousness of God, and found wanting.

The stakes are high, indeed. We are promised that if we will "Walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live; and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the Land that you shall possess" (33).

# MARCH 21

## *Deuteronomy 6-8*



**I**F THE OLD TESTAMENT WAS GOOD ENOUGH TO KEEP JESUS FROM TEMPTATION, IT IS MORE THAN ADEQUATE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF MY SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE.

Prior to the onset of Jesus' public ministry, he "was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1). At the end of forty days of fasting, Satan came to Jesus and offered three temptations concerning his identity as the son of God, using his time worn technique of attempting to generate doubt. (It worked well with Eve in Genesis 3.) Each time Jesus replied to the devil, "it is written" and proceeded to quote passages from Deuteronomy (8:3, 6:16, 6:13) on one's proper relationship to God.

Two things stand out concerning Deuteronomy:

**1. Jesus quotes three times from Deuteronomy**, signifying its authorship had divine origin and should be treated as direct commands of God.

**2. Scripture memory was not meant to be just a mental or spiritual exercise;** it can mean the difference in victory or defeat, of living or dying. To be physically spent from a forty day fast and be able to withstand the repeated encounters with Satan by replying to his offers with the appropriate words of God is remarkable. Jesus did not hesitate, nor give pause, but spoke from a deep and abiding knowledge of the word of God. He read and meditated on these scriptures over the years to the point they were second nature to him, and they were the basis of his decisions to resist the devil.

Too many contemporary Christians spend scant time in the Old Testament. May we live not by bread alone, but "by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (8:3b).

# MARCH 22

## *Deuteronomy 6*



**S**OME PHRASES BECOME EAR WORMS FOR A GENERATION.

Sports phrases, political jingles, song lyrics, punchy participles, and lines from movies and plays endure for decades. Some rare thoughts become so seminal in establishing a society's identity that they take on a life of their own, and establish their own category of importance.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (4-5)

The collective wisdom of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5 is summed up in chapter 6 by what Hebrews call the Shema, "to hear or hearken." It is at once a declaration of a monotheistic faith, a pledge to live a totally committed life to God, and an evangelistic appeal to join in this life of worship and service in his name. In forming a new covenant with the people of God, Jesus as his son affirms this statement as the greatest commandment, and declares that the whole of the law and the prophets is bound up in it (Matthew 22:37-40).

Standing before the Western Wall in old Jerusalem, one experiences the full spectrum of life - men decked out in elaborate phylacteries kissing the wall, women huddled toward it on the other side of a partition between the sexes, a bar mitzvah taking place amid great singing and laughter, soldiers and scholars alike reverently asking God for the desires of their heart. There is a communal declaration of faith in God.

What is the bedrock confession of your faith in him?

# MARCH 23

*Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2*



**O**NE'S DESIRE TO BE CHOSEN HINGES LARGELY ON THE PERCEIVED REWARD OR DUTY ATTACHED TO IT.

A playground selection of teams is a noisy affair with children jostling one another to be noticed and selected before others. A battlefield where great loss is occurring can be largely silent as teams are formed for impossible tasks, and infantrymen are jostling one another in an effort to avoid notice and eventual selection.

On more than one occasion in Deuteronomy, the Hebrew people are reminded that they are a chosen people, and the person choosing them is God himself (7:6, 14:2). Each time the pronouncement of them being chosen is prefaced by the phrase “you are a people holy to the Lord your God.” Too many over the centuries have mistakenly read into this passage that they were chosen for their inherent specialness, they were deserving of the honor, or the choice was a validation of their goodness. They were holy, but not because of their inherent sinlessness. Deuteronomy is filled with repeated litanies of Israel’s shortcomings and rebellious sin. Holiness in this sense is not about purity but about separation. These people were set apart for a task. The same theme is repeated throughout the Bible: We are blessed so that the ends of the earth may fear him (Psalm 67), Jesus tells his disciples that he chose them to bear fruit (John 15:16), and Paul realizes in Damascus he was chosen as God’s gospel conduit to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15).

We are chosen to be conduits of God’s grace to others. When God chooses us for a task, the emphasis should not be on whether we reap reward or suffer loss, but whether or not God receives the glory and his Gospel is proclaimed.



# MARCH 24

*Deuteronomy 7:6-26*



**W**HEN CONSIDERING FINANCIAL INVESTMENTS TO PURSUE, “PAST PERFORMANCE IS NOT A RELIABLE INDICATOR OF FUTURE RESULTS.”

While that lowers expectations and avoids guaranteeing results, the company usually provides annual yields of a particular investment for one, five, ten years, or since inception. A track record materializes to the point an investor can, to a degree, deduce what to expect from that investment.

The track records of God and of his people are thoroughly consistent throughout the book of Deuteronomy, and the entire Bible. The scenario usually unfolds like this: God’s people are complacent, then forgetful, then ungrateful, then openly rebellious. At some point, God reminds, then warns, then acts. The people confess, then repent, and pledge to honor his commandments.

Deuteronomy reviews all that God spoke during the wilderness experience, and recounts his actions on their behalf and corrections when they strayed. I have journaled my adult life, and periodically read passages from past entries. Patterns emerge for both how God has intervened in my life, and how I responded.

God’s faithfulness is unconditional, but not always his blessings. Today’s passage clearly connects his blessings to the faithfulness of his people. Take time to review encounters with God, and the triumphs and shortcomings. Is there still forgiveness and grace? Absolutely! God’s is eager to to bless and provide for us.

**Questions for personal reflection:** Does God have reason to doubt his investment in me? Do I squander his goodness and mercy? Does it grieve my spirit to do so? Am I willing to start a new track record today?

# MARCH 25

## *Deuteronomy 8*



**D**ON'T AVOID THE WILDERNESS EXPERIENCES; THEY REVEAL AS MUCH CHARACTER AS THEY CREATE.

“And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not” (8:2)

Every parent can recount a variation of this scenario: The child comes with either a terminal case of sadness or anger, and demands to know when they can have \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank with a horse, guitar, chemistry set, keys to the car, grand piano, an around the world cruise, etc.). Simple denials are met with juvenile reasoning, temper tantrums, or litanies about why they are deprived and how this will stunt their march to maturity. Substitutes are greeted with rolled or misty eyes. Promises of future fulfillment fall on deaf ears because the next sunset is an eternity away for them.

The proper emphasis is not on my deprivation from things, but deficiency in character and glorification of God. He used the wilderness to drain some things out of their collective identity and to stamp it with others.

Jesus underwent a wilderness experience before he began his public ministry. If the Lord so grants for each of us to wander in his wilderness, we should welcome it, not for the travail it might bring during its traversing, but for the joy set before us at our eventual departure into his ministry and presence.

For a musical setting of this concept, hear singer Michael Card's version at <http://bit.do/mc-in-the-wilderness>.

# MARCH 26

## *Deuteronomy 9*



**M**OSSES GAVE THE REPEATED EXAMPLE OF PERSISTENT PRAYER, EVEN WHEN THE RESULTS ARE LESS THAN DESIRED.

There are limitless qualities one can place their trust when a challenge arises: intelligence, beauty, strength, will, quick reflexes, balance, wealth, inheritance, charm, killer smile, surplus of charisma, intuition, etc. Trust in one's abilities is not necessarily good or bad as long as it remains secondary. Our ultimate trust, our ultimate allegiance, our ultimate faith, must be in God. When things go bad, and we detour for forty years, we must remain faithful to him. When things seem to miraculously come together in one's favor, the primary trust must also be in God. The tendency for leaders is to attribute the success of the project to superior planning, decision making, or selection of team members, instead of acknowledging the Lord's hand and guidance.

Moses reminds Israel multiple times in Deuteronomy 9 to credit God as the one who grants victory (3, 4, 9). He then admonishes them in the second half of the chapter to stop squandering their opportunities in order to showcase the Lord's might. He also warns about interceding more than once on their behalf to God, in light of his willingness to give up on Israel due to their missed opportunities and stubbornness (14, 18, 20, 25). This cannot continue.

To the rank and file members of the vast crowd, Moses issued his version of *carpe diem*, seize the day. It's time to break huddle, make a play, and give God the glory. Seize the day, not the glory.

*Soli Deo gloria*, to God alone be the glory, then, now, and forever.

# MARCH 27

*Deuteronomy 9:1-12*



**A** RESUME HAS LONG BEEN AN ENTRY POINT FOR EMPLOYMENT. BALANCING MODESTY AND RESTRAINT, WITH SELF-CONFIDENCE ON ONE OR TWO PAGES, IS A DIFFICULT TASK.

Moses tosses the collective resume of the Hebrew wilderness wanderers in some unnamed Sinai cave in Deuteronomy 9. He details that God will lead the way into the Promised Land, not their tribal leaders (1-3), making sure the crowd understands they may do the fighting but God is the “consuming fire” He’s the destroyer, and he deserves the credit and their faith.

Moses repeatedly spells out in no uncertain terms they will prevail, but not because of their own righteousness (4-6). They will prevail because of the faithfulness of God to fulfill his covenant with Israel. In the New Testament we see this same thought when Paul states, “as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 5.21). God leads the Hebrews in battle for the Promised Land, and Christ leads our daily Kingdom battles, not armed with our righteousness, but his and his alone.

That our righteousness is not worthy is clearly illustrated in their worship of the golden calf immediately after receiving the tablets of stone engraved with the Ten Commandments, by the very finger of God (7-12).

When you face your next battle, promotion, tension-filled boardroom meeting, or the pressures of everyday life, transform from annoyance into assailants, remember the emphasis is not reserved for your competence or character, but rather it is Christ Jesus to whom all praise is due.

# MARCH 28

*Deuteronomy 12-26*



**T**HE MIDDLE OF DEUTERONOMY SPEAKS TO MANY AREAS OF DAILY LIFE RANGING FROM THE MUNDANE TO MAJOR LIFE EVENTS AND BACK.

“Well, that about covers it.” “I think we covered all the bases.” “We left no stone unturned.” These phrases spoken at the end of an argument, a speech, or a parental admonishment indicate every contingent and possibility as it relates to the matter at hand has been addressed.

The main thought today is that God’s love for us cannot be compartmentalized and contained in the “religious” section of our lives. Every command of God is for our protection or our provision; these chapters describe not do’s and don’ts, but how pervasive and loving our father’s care is for us. It is about having godly marriages, acting godly toward those who wrong us, godly management of finances, rules of military engagement, and worship to name a few. They speak to most areas of our lives, not as advice, but as shapers of society.

Some of the chapters seem far removed from our present everyday existence. The principle remains that God should not be a last resort or used as a life preserver when we start drowning because we did not heed his warnings. He desires to protect and provide for us in every aspect of our lives, from family to finances, from our trade to our thought life. He is to be the first and last, everything in between, our all in all, and Lord of our lives - not just our Sundays or our private prayers.

# MARCH 29

## *Deuteronomy 29*



**T**HE WIFE SAYS, “WHY DO I NEVER HEAR YOU SAY, I LOVE YOU?” THE HUSBAND REPLIES, “I SAID I LOVED YOU AT OUR WEDDING. IF THAT EVER CHANGES, I’LL NOTIFY YOU.”

A wedding ceremony contains different creative elements, but most people travel long distances to experience the bride and groom’s vows. They speak of their love for one another, their faithfulness, and their promise to provide and protect one another till death separates them. It is both a solemn and a heartwarming moment. Some are vicariously transported to another time and place when they spoke such a vow, evoking deep joy or sorrow, or both if their spouse is deceased. That moment is a renewal of vows for random family and friends, and can become a worship experience.

Moses spoke at length and multiple times to the nomadic Israel. They are no longer the same people who left Egypt. Upon departure, there was no thought about a long stay in the wilderness, much less forty years. Almost all who left Egypt have passed away. The Abrahamic and now Mosaic covenant needed to be affirmed by a new generation and on a new occasion, the entry into the Promised Land. There needed to be a corporate pledge to God and to each other of love and allegiance, magnified by the transition from passive group of nomads to a fighting force.

In days gone by, a church covenant hung in most church building halls, reminding members of their sacred promises to God and one another. Your church is not the same one you joined; some have departed this world, their faith, or your town, and others have taken their place. How long has it been since your church has pledged to God their love and allegiance to Christ, his word, and each other?

# MARCH 30

*Deuteronomy 30:15-20*



**T**HE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS IS OFTEN PROBLEMATIC FOR BELIEVERS TO ARTICULATE. DOES ONE NEGATE THE OTHER?

Many Christians, for all practical purposes, pay lip service to the Old Testament, viewing it as a repository of great moral stories from the lives of Daniel, Noah, and King David, yet not viewing it as binding. Other groups want to make sure their particular group heed every Old Testament command.

The word of God, the will of God, and the way of God are all wrapped up in the person of Jesus Christ (John 14:6; 15:10; 17:17). The Bible is not to be worshiped, that is bibliolatry; Jesus cautions us on that (John 5:39). The Holy Bible points at every direction to Jesus. In this respect, the New Testament does not substitute for the Old Testament as much as it supersedes it. If you drop a handkerchief from your hand, it will fall to the floor. If you repeat the motion but halt its downward motion with the other hand, you have not negated the force of gravity - it's still in effect as it was before. You have superseded it with another force. The Bible points out my sin and the path I must take to eternal life, and that is God providing himself as the path.

Both testaments speak to this. In verse 16, we are admonished to obey the commandments of God. In verse 30, we are told that God himself "is your life and length of days." In Romans 10:5-9, Paul refers to Moses' emphasis on obeying God's commandments as a source of life, and proclaims that confessing Jesus as Lord results in salvation. Read the book of Deuteronomy with confidence that you are reading the written word of God which points you to the living word of God.

# MARCH 31

## *Deuteronomy 31*



**A**FTER THIRTY CHAPTERS OF ADMONITIONS, REMINDERS, AND A CALL TO COVENANT RENEWAL WITH GOD, ISRAEL WITNESSES MOSES COMMISSIONING JOSHUA AS HIS SUCCESSOR.

Joshua had been Moses' faithful and faith-filled lieutenant (Numbers 27). His commissioning is expected and welcomed by the masses. In later passages, Joshua proves a spiritually wise and effective choice, skillfully leading the people of God to conquer the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 35).

If Deuteronomy was only historical fiction without divine inspiration, this chapter would have the music swell, flags unfurl, people cheer, and Joshua sweep some Jewish maiden off her feet in a passionate kiss as Moses looks on approvingly. A symbolic torch would pass from Moses to Joshua who holds it aloft to loud crowd approval.

In reality, God decides to crash the commissioning. He says Moses will die, Joshua will be commissioned, and the people of God will ignore all of his commands - describing their apostasy in vulgar terms. God turns to Joshua and says, "Be strong and courageous and carry on! And through all of this horrible mess, I will be with you."

As a minister of God, this offers comfort, not despair. God does not mince words or gloss the situation, He shoots straight. "I need a leader who understands this is impossible, full of disappointment, and a heartache. I need a leader with eyes wide open, yet who knows I will not abandon him if he walks with me."

For the person engaged in or contemplating becoming active in ministry, we are not in this for reward, glamour, power, or fame. We are in ministry because we were commissioned by God almighty, and as long as he will not abandon me, I'm in.



# APRIL 1

## *Joshua 1*



**J**OSHUA IS TO THE PENTATEUCH (GENESIS THROUGH DEUTERONOMY), WHAT ACTS IS TO THE FOUR GOSPELS (MATTHEW THROUGH JOHN).

This book reports the men of God (10), leading the people of God, to trust and obey the word of God (16); as a result, experiencing a new flourishing expansion of God's kingdom (3), by the grace of God (9).

Joshua was prepared for leadership (1). At Moses' death, Joshua is commissioned by God as the leader of God's people (2) to "be strong and courageous" (6, 7, 8, 18). The ground of such strength and courage is found in three changeless factors provided by God:

**1. The written word of God (7-8, 13):** As the people of God stood ready to enter the land of promise, God's emphasis was upon the Book (7-8). God's invitation to Joshua was to *speak repeatedly* about the written word, *think deeply* about the word of God, and *do carefully* what the word of God says (8).

**2. The abiding presence of God (5, 9, 17):** There was much to fear in the battles ahead, but God called Joshua to strength and courage by assuring him God's presence would not be withdrawn (5). The antidote to fear and despair is the presence of the living God that goes before, and with his people, through steadfast love (9).

**3. The trustworthy promise of God (3, 5, 6, 15):** God is changeless, faithful, and all-powerful; his promises are certain, trustworthy, and secure. God expects Joshua to trust in his faithfulness, God's own strength to God's own covenant (3, 5).

Jesus is the very word of God (John 1:1), God with us (Matthew 1:23), and the fulfillment of all the promises of God (2 Corinthians 1:20). He invites any and all to find indomitable strength and courage through faith in his word, presence, and faithfulness.

# APRIL 2

## Joshua 2



**T**HERE IS NO GETTING AROUND IT, RAHAB WAS A PROSTITUTE.

In a godless culture, she found her living wage supplied by her own sinful lifestyle (1). When the people of God came near to Jericho, the whole town was struck with fear (11). They had heard stories of God's mighty acts of deliverance for his people, and God's righteous judgment on his enemies (10). The whole town was filled with *fear* of God, but only Rahab was filled with *faith* in God, and his merciful saving deliverance for sinners (12-13). It is not fear of God's justice and destruction alone, but faith in the one true God's provision to deliver sinners that saves. Many did not believe and perished (Joshua 6:21). Rahab believed and was "saved alive" (Joshua 6:25).

This newfound faith in her heart was evidenced through the costly actions of her hands as she hid two spies of God's people from the enemy, and hung a scarlet cord in the window of her house as a mark of her faith in God's merciful deliverance (Hebrews 11:31).

By faith, Rahab the prostitute, become Rahab the prophet (18), running through a city of destruction, gathering her family and urging them to flee to safety from the wrath of God beneath the mark of the scarlet cord. Such safety is found for any of us spiritual harlots (Jeremiah 2), through faith in Jesus, the one true God. Jesus lived a life without sin, then got up on a cross to become Rahab's sin and our sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). Such faith is evidenced through *bold* and *costly* actions to save others, and such faith results in good works (Ephesians 2:8-10, James 2:21, 25).

There is no getting around it, God saves the worst of sinners, from the worst of towns, by faith in Jesus Christ.

# APRIL 3

## *Joshua 3-4*



**S**OME TRUTHS ARE WORTH REMEMBERING. “AS I WAS WITH MOSES, SO I WILL BE WITH YOU” (JOSHUA 1:5).

As the people of God move toward the land of promise and prepare for battle, God works in power, “tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you” (3:5), to demonstrate his presence (3:7, 4:14).

God displayed his presence with Moses in mighty wonders (Exodus 3:20) that culminated in the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15:8), and God displayed his presence with Joshua in this miraculous crossing of the Jordan (3:16). God ensured this powerful display of the presence of God with Joshua was “in the sight of all Israel, and they stood in awe of him just as they had stood in awe of Moses, all the days of his life” (4:14).

As the people crossed the Jordan, they learned two things: 1. The power that was present with Moses was unchanged and present with Joshua. 2. God’s *power* is inextricably linked to God’s *presence*, “as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.” (3:7). God wanted his people to remember these truths, so they built a memorial (4:1-7).

Where the presence of God was *with* Joshua and Moses, the whole fullness of God dwelled *bodily in* Jesus (Colossians 2:9). The same power that was present with Moses and Joshua, Jesus claimed had been given to him (Matthew 28:18b). Further, Jesus said to his church, “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8a).

The power of God is linked to God’s presence, and the living Spirit of God has come to dwell in the people of God through faith (Ephesians 1:19-20, 3:17). Are you struggling in your own strength? God’s presence is in you through faith. That is worth remembering.

# APRIL 4

## *Joshua 5-6*



**O**N THE WAY TO WAR AGAINST JERICHO AND ENTER THE LAND OF PROMISE, THE LORD CALLED JOSHUA TO CIRCUMCISE ALL OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL (5:2).

Before a great and bloody battle against an opposing army, all the men of war were voluntarily incapacitated by their commander (5:3). What a foolish militaristic act! But what a whole-hearted act of trust in God. These men cast their very lives upon the faithfulness of God, with no plan B. Their circumcision marked them out as men who no longer bore the reproach of Egypt, but bore the mark of trust in God (5:9). This was a battle of trust.

The strategic battle plan included worship (5:14), walking (6:3), and wailing (6:5). In their weakness, God was shown as strong, and the battle did not belong to the horse and chariot, but to God who fought for them and accomplished victory for those who fear him and hope in his steadfast love (Psalm 33:16-19).

“While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). The way of salvation is not in the works of our own hands (Ephesians 2:8), but in confessing our sin (1 John 1:7-9), acknowledging our weakness (Jeremiah 9:23-24), and casting ourselves upon Christ with no plan B (Proverbs 3:5-6). Our baptism marks us out as men and women who no longer bear the reproach of our sin, but have professed publicly our trust in Jesus.

The Gospel is a battle of trust. Our victory lies in the victory of another (Colossians 5:15). In our trust, God is shown as glorious (Corinthians 1:31) because the battle does not belong to the proud and righteous, but to God who bore our sin and accomplished our victory at the cross.

# APRIL 5

## *Joshua 7-8*



**A**NOTHER DAY, ANOTHER BATTLE AS JOSHUA SENT MEN FROM JERICO TO AI TO CONTINUE TAKING THE LAND THAT GOD HAD PROMISED (7:2-3).

This time there were vastly different results. Thirty-six men lost their lives and the army fled back to camp in terror and fear (7:5).

How could the people of God who saw victory in Jericho have faced such a defeat in Ai? They had the written word of God, they had the power and presence of God, and they were strong and courageous. Joshua laments their loss before God in self-pity (7:6-9), but does not lament their sin before God in repentance.

In the midst of sin and defeat, there was only one way forward, “Get up! Consecrate the people and say, ‘Consecrate yourselves’” (7:10). The Lord himself identified Achan as the man who sinned (7:16-18). He “coveted” the possessions that belonged to God and “took them” (7:21). As a result of this man’s individual sin, 36 men lost their lives (7:5). Sin always has social ramifications.

The whole community joined in the judgment of Achan, because they had been affected by the sin of Achan (7:25-26). With sin dealt with, God reassured Joshua of his power, presence and promise (8:1), and this time the battle was victorious (8:28-29).

1. **Sin is not secret.** God sees and knows all (1 John 1:10).
2. **Sin is not personal.** Our individual sin detrimentally affects our church family (Acts 5:1-11).
3. **Sin is not safe.** Christ will be judged for our sin on the cross through faith, or we will be judged for our sin in hell (John 3:36).
4. **Sin is not final.** If we confess our sin, Jesus is faithful and just to forgive us of our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7-2:2)

# APRIL 6

*Joshua 8:30-35*



**R**ELIGION APART FROM THE GOSPEL TRIES TO SCALE MOUNT GERIZIM TO RECEIVE THE BLESSING OF GOD BY WORKS OF OUR OWN HANDS.

After crossing into the land of promise, and conquering Jericho and Ai, Joshua leads the people of God in a covenant renewal prescribed by Moses earlier in Deuteronomy 27:1-7. God commanded two mountains be marked out, Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. The law would be read aloud from these two mountains - curses for sin read from Mount Ebal (Deuteronomy 27:13-14), and blessings for obedience read from Mount Gerizim (Deuteronomy 27:11).

Before the law would be dramatized to them in this way, an altar would be built on Mount Ebal to speak two powerful truths:

**1. This altar was not built on the mountain of blessing, Mount Gerizim, but on the mountain from which the warning of the curses for sin would be read, Mount Ebal (Joshua 8:30).** Hear the gospel. On the very mountain of warning against sin, God also provided an altar for sacrifice to be made for sin (1 John 2:1).

**2. This altar of sacrifice was “an altar of uncut stones, upon which no man has wielded an iron tool” (Joshua 8:31).** God was teaching there is no work of man that can atone for sin, but the only way to come to God will be through sacrifice for our sin, not through keeping the law or of any other work (Romans 4:3-4).

God provides an altar only on Mount Ebal, and the message is clear; The only way for the people of God to come into blessing is through the altar where our sin is atoned for and sacrifice is made. Thanks be to God who provided himself as the sacrifice for our sin, bearing the curse of the law, that we might receive the blessings of Mount Gerizim on the basis of his work alone (Galatians 3:13-14)!

# APRIL 7

## *Joshua 9-10*



**W**ORD OF GOD'S POWER WITH HIS PEOPLE CONTINUED TO SPREAD AND A FIVE-NATION ARMY WAS FORGED TO BATTLE AGAINST JOSHUA AND THE MEN OF ISRAEL (9:1-2).

The Gibeonites, chose not fight the people of God, but joined them through an act of deception (9:3-4). Pretending to come from far outside the land of promise, the Gibeonites offered themselves as servants if they would sign a peace treaty (9:5-13). Without consulting God, Israel entered a covenant of peace with them (9:14-15). Three days later, Joshua confronted the Gibeonites, and they revealed the cause of their deception (9:24a). Although deceived, the men of Israel chose to be faithful to their agreement. An oath made before God must not be broken (9:16-21). As a result, the Gibeonites were welcomed into the people of God (9:27).

Hearing of this alliance, the rival faction of five armies launched a campaign to wipe out the Gibeonites (10:1-5). Israel responded with faithfulness to their covenant (10:7), God assured Joshua of victory, and the southern region of the land of promise was miraculously taken by the people of God (10:8-43).

Every one of us were rebels and failures by virtue of our sins of nature and choice, but God welcomed us into a covenant of peace, not by deception, but by gracious invitation (Ephesians 2:4-8). God insisted the Israelites keep their oath with the Gibeonites even though deceived. If God required the upholding of an oath made in his name under deception, how much more will he uphold his covenant made to us on the basis of the atoning blood and cross-work of his own son Jesus Christ?

Your standing with God is as secure as God's own faithfulness.

# APRIL 8

*Joshua 11-12*



**T**HE PROMISES OF GOD TO ABRAHAM, ISAAC, JACOB, MOSES, JOSHUA, AND TO ALL OF HIS PEOPLE, BEGIN TO FIND THEIR FULFILLMENT IN THE LAND.

God's promise to Abraham included a land in which he would establish a nation (Genesis 12). Yet, at the end of Genesis, the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are living in Egypt, not the land of promise. In Exodus, we find the people were enslaved for 430 years until God raised up Moses to lead them out, promising, "I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord." (Exodus 6:8). When Moses dies, Joshua was commissioned to lead and God reassured him of his promise, "Every place that the soul of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses" (Joshua 1:3). Joshua emphasizes God's faithfulness:

- "Just as the Lord had said" (11:9).
- "Just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded" (11:12).
- "Just as the Lord had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did. He left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses" (11:15).
- "Just as the Lord commanded Moses" (11:20).
- "So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses" (11:23).

As Joshua goes on to list the conquests of Moses on the east side of the Jordan (12:1-7), and the conquests of Joshua on the west side of the Jordan (12:7-24), there is one resounding message to be heard from every battle won and every foot of ground gained; what God has promised he will fulfill. You can count on it.



# APRIL 9

## *Joshua 13*



**N**OW THAT THE LAND GOD PROMISED HAD BEEN CONQUERED, IT WAS ALLOCATED AND OCCUPIED AMONG THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

Yet, after these supernatural victories, grew a failure of lethargy among the people of God. Joshua rebukes them, “How long will you put off going in to take possession of the land, which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you” (Joshua 18:3)?

The reason for their failure is described in Joshua 17:13, “Now when the people of Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not utterly drive them out.”

**1. The people did not lay hold of what was already theirs because they settled for partial obedience.** God had been clear through Moses, they must utterly drive out the Canaanites lest their children be turned away to follow false gods (Deuteronomy 7:1-6). Choosing to obey on their own terms rather than God’s clear terms, the people of God failed to possess what God had given.

**2. The people did not lay hold of what was already theirs because they sought to benefit from lingering temptation.** Rather than drive out the Canaanites, they put them to forced labor. In opening themselves to temptation, it was only one generation later that Judges reports “there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel” (Judges 2:10).

Is there a lingering temptation you’ve given the key to come and go as it pleases? God has given you his Spirit not to remain at peace with sin, not to exploit sin for your benefit, not to partially deal with sin, but to utterly drive out sin with no mercy by the empowering grace of God (Romans 8:13).

# APRIL 10

*Joshua 14:6-15*



**C**ALEB WHOLLY FOLLOWED THE LORD, AND LAID HOLD OF THE PROMISE THAT GOD HAD GIVEN.

Forty years prior, when the rest of the spies were terrified of the Canaanites, Caleb and Joshua were strong and courageous, believing they could occupy the land because God had promised it. Now, at the age of eighty-five, Caleb intended to prove it by taking and claiming the land that God had promised him (6-12).

There are gospel promises throughout the Bible for Christians:

- “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).
- “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).
- “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).
- “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

Promises of no condemnation for the guilt-ridden Christian, promises of the actual living Spirit of God bearing fruit in our life, promises of all things working together for the good of the called, and promises to indomitably build his church. These promises and more are pearls of great hope that shine all the brighter, “For all the promises of God find their yes in [Jesus]” (2 Corinthians 1:20).

God is faithful to his promises, so with Caleb, let us lay hold of God’s “yes” in Christ through faith and walk in our inheritance by his empowering grace.

# APRIL 11

## *Joshua 15-19*



**N**OT ONE WORD OF ALL THE GOOD PROMISES THAT THE LORD HAD MADE TO THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL HAD FAILED; ALL CAME TO PASS” (JOSHUA 21:45).

Joshua 15-19 describes the allocation of the land of promise to the tribes of Israel. Each allotment is the outworking of a promise God had made centuries prior. Judah received the first fruits of the land even though he was not the firstborn (15:1-63). Why? Because God is a living God who knows, sees, and tells the future.

Long ago Jacob, inspired by God, foretold the future of his sons (Genesis 49):

- Reuben, the firstborn son’s sexual sin (Genesis 35:22), set aside his priority in the inheritance (Genesis 49:3-4).
- Simeon and Levi, second and third born, were not given a fixed location of land because of their violent vengeance on Shechem (Genesis 34, 49:5-7).
- Judah, the fourth born, received first place in the divisions of the land of promise, just as God had promised (Gen. 49:8-10). This is significant because the great King David was in the line of Judah, and the greatest King Jesus, was in the line of David.

With every division of land, God is saying, “See? You can trust me! What I said I would accomplish, I have accomplished.”

“Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’” (Isaiah 46:9-10).

Every Word of God is changeless.

What God has said, God will do. You can count on it.

# APRIL 12

## *Joshua 20-21*



**W**ITHOUT LAND, THE LEVITES FOUND THEIR LIVING IN THE GENEROUS OFFERINGS OTHERS MADE TO GOD (NUMBERS 18:26).

The Levites were allocated no land, but forty-eight cities were given to them to live in (21:1-3). Six of these cities were designated as cities of refuge (Numbers 35:6, Joshua 20:1-2). If an Israelite or refugee committed an accidental murder, and another man came to avenge his blood, he could flee to a city of refuge and find sanctuary (Joshua 20:1-6, 9; Deuteronomy 19:1-13; Numbers 35:4-5, 15-30).

Francis Schaeffer points out four ways cities of refuge proclaimed the gospel:

1. They were open to all, so Christ is easy to reach and open to any who would cast themselves upon him by faith (Revelation 22:17).
2. The gates were never locked, lest a man die while waiting for the door to open, so Christ never turns away a repentant sinner who comes to him (John 6:37).
3. Each were stocked with food to provide not only legal protection, but also meet a man's needs once inside. Christ justifies a sinner making them legally safe, and provides spiritual blessings to satisfy every need (Ephesians 1:1-14).
4. If a killer did not flee to a city of refuge, there was no other help for him, so Christ is the only name given under heaven by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Christ is a greater city of refuge. He welcomes and protects not only the innocent, for there are none, but any of us deliberate sinners through his sacrificial death in our place (Hebrews 7:23-27).

Today will you flee to Christ your refuge as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul (Hebrews 13:18-19)?

# APRIL 13

## *Joshua 22*



**L**OVE, UNITY, OR PEACE THAT IS NOT GROUNDED IN TRUTH IS NOTHING.

After seven years of fighting together as brothers, the final allotment of land was made, and the fighting men from each tribe said their goodbyes, divided the spoils, and returned to their new towns (1-9).

The eastern tribes built a prominent altar that was large enough to be seen by all (10). Immediately, the tribes on the west were ready to make war against their brother tribes on the east (11-12). By building an altar, they appeared to be establishing a rival and false worship in rebellion against God. Now they were preparing for war against the very brothers whom they had fought alongside of.

If there was a departure from the gospel, there had to be battle (Jude 3). Regardless of familial ties, the purity of the gospel and the worship of Jesus Christ must never be compromised (Galatians 1:6-9). Before rushing to attack, leaders of the western tribes made their charge, yet sought clarification for the sake of reconciliation (15-20). While they were willing to go to battle for the gospel, their first instinct was to seek a solution with their brothers (19). Truth that does not pursue peace, unity, and love is not truth.

The western tribes did not rush to attack without first seeking to understand. The eastern tribes did not get offended and sulk. The whole conflict was a simple misunderstanding (26-27), and by gracious biblical conflict resolution, the whole issue was resolved without war (30-34).

Those passionate for pursuing unity must not sacrifice obedience to God's Word for artificial peace. Those bold in contending for the truth, must also be bold in acting in love. Jesus came full of grace and truth (John 14:1). Let's look to him today.

# APRIL 14

## *Joshua 23*



**S**PIRITUAL DRIFT IS A DEADLY CURRENT (15-16). JOSHUA'S CHARGE CALLED FOR FOUR CONTINUAL PRACTICES TO FIGHT THE CURRENT.

**1. Follow the Word (6):** When we *hear* the Word, without *keeping* and *doing* what it says, our hearts are on a dangerous course (James 1:22-25). When we selectively choose parts of Scripture to obey or believe, while minimizing what makes us uncomfortable, we are cutting a vital cord that binds our hearts to Christ (Acts 20:27).

**2. Flee from idols (7):** While we may not bow to idols made of wood or stone, our culture's idols of power, approval, control, and comfort vie for our allegiance daily (1 John 2:16). Only the power of new affections for Christ is enough to end our spiritual adultery and bind our hearts to Christ (Ezekiel 26:25-26).

**3. Hold fast to Christ (8):** Just as a husband cleaves to his wife (Genesis 2:24), and a small child holds fast to their parents, clinging to Christ is a daily disposition, "just as you have done to this day." Cleaving to Christ is encouraged by Christian brothers and sisters who encourage one another daily so they are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13-14).

**4. Feel affections for the Lord:** "Be very careful," Joshua charges, "to love the Lord your God." Just as Solomon and his young bride were careful to catch the little foxes that would ruin the vineyard of their love (Song of Solomon 2:15), so we must continually put to death whatever robs our affections for Christ.

Though Joshua knew our hearts were, as Robinson Robins' hymn "Come Thou Fount" expresses, "prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love," he prescribed these four fetters of grace to "bind our wandering hearts to Thee."

# APRIL 15

## *Joshua 24*



**G**RACE DEMANDS COMMITMENT. CHOOSE TODAY, WHOM YOU WILL SERVE! (15)

**God's grace upon the Israelites had been lavish:** "I took your father Abraham ... and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac" (3). "I gave Jacob and Esau ... " (4). "I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt ... afterward I brought you out" (5). "I brought" (6). "I did" (7). "I brought you ... I gave them ... I destroyed them" (8). "I delivered you" (10). "I gave them into your hand" (11). "I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built ... You eat the fruit of vineyards ... that you did not plant" (13).

**God's grace demanded urgent and exclusive commitment:** "Therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served ... serve the Lord" (14).

**God's grace upon us has been lavish:** "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." (Romans 5:6)

**God's grace demands our urgent and exclusive commitment:** "We bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them." (Acts 14:15)

Francis Schaeffer says, "The Bible insists, 'Don't forget who you are. You are not a puppet or a machine ... you are made in the image of God ... you must choose, and choose rightly, at every point.' Adam chose wrongly, and we all bear the marks. Abraham believed God, and his choice was counted to him for righteousness. Joshua chose rightly, too. For those of us today, the situation is the same"

The gods of pride, power, and pleasure call for your allegiance at the cost of our life. The true God has declared his allegiance to you at the cost of his own life. Choose today, whom you will serve!

# APRIL 16

*Judges 1; 2:1-2*



**W**E CONTINUOUSLY MISS THE MARK THAT GOD HAS ESTABLISHED FOR US.

Keri Blakinge, shares in The Washington Post, on January 21, 2015:

I was a senior at Cornell University when I was arrested for heroin possession. As an addict – a condition that began during a deep depression – I was muddling my way through classes and doing many things I would come to regret, including selling drugs to pay for my own habit. I even began dating a man with big-time drug connections that put me around large amounts of heroin. When police arrested me in 2010, I was carrying six ounces, an amount they valued at \$50,000 – enough to put me in prison for up to 10 years.

The first 26 verses of chapter 1, we see the people of Israel inquire of God as to who was going to go into battle for them. This was the beginning of carrying out God’s plan – to drive them out and destroy the altars to their god’s. We soon discover in verses 27-36 that the plan was not carried out, which is sin, and the result was God would not drive them out, and their god’s would be a “snare” to them. The people of Israel had missed the mark.

The word for sin in the Greek language is “amartia” (ha-martia). It means “to miss the mark.” As we look through the book of Judges, we see the recurring theme that individuals with no guiding standard fall headlong into sin.

The need for a savior becomes more and more apparent as we see our shortcomings in every aspect of our lives. We need to continue to demonstrate the desire to become more like Christ every day, a true Christ follower.



# APRIL 17

*Judges 2:3-23; 3-6*



**G**OD'S SEVERE DISCIPLINE WAS DESIGNED TO CAUSE ISRAEL TO TURN BACK TO HIM.

Chip Ingram says, "Sometimes smart people do dumb things, wise people do foolish things, and Godly people do sinful things. For some of us those things are a big, dark, ugly past. For others, it's a secret we've never told anyone. Maybe it's an abortion you had, or an affair, or you stole something."

Through Judges 3-6, we see that our continuous disobedience to God has cost. The Israelites had seen what God can do, "... who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel" (2:7), as well as saw the compassion of God. Yet, they continued to be disobedient to the commands of God. These rebellious acts brought discipline from God until we see Deborah and Barak in the end of chapter 5 and chapter 6, and they are praising God for his deliverance, and celebrating the victories.

Regardless of how we messed up, the one thing we all share in common is that we've all made mistakes. The Bible says "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Yet, many of us don't know how to recover afterward.

So, how do we get right with God again after we've done something entirely wrong?

**Step 1:** Come clean with God.

**Step 2:** Ask God for forgiveness.

**Step 3:** Own responsibility for your sin.

**Step 4:** Accept God's forgiveness and cleansing.

**Step 5:** Request a fresh work of grace.

**Step 6:** Resolve to use past failures for ministry.

**Step 7:** Pray for limited fallout.

# APRIL 18

## *Judges 6-8*



**G**IDEON IS CALLED TO BE THE DELIVERER OF ISRAEL, HOWEVER, JUST LIKE US, GIDEON IS QUESTIONING WHAT GOD IS DOING.

Gideon questions the angel who bring the news of God's calling. "And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, 'The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor.' And Gideon said to him, 'Please, my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us'" (6:12-13)? This sounds just like us when we have an encounter with God. We constantly focus on our struggles instead of the might that God gives us and uses to make us victorious.

Gideon got the confirmation of his calling by the Lord; we need to do the same thing. If we want to be battle ready then we need to rely on the power that God is trying to demonstrate in our lives. Gideon was told by the Lord, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you" (6:14)? The might that God had given him is demonstrated in Judges 6-8:

- Gideon had the **might** of the *humble*, threshing wheat on the winepress floor.
- Gideon had the **might** of the *caring* because he cared about the low place of Israel.
- Gideon had the **might** of *knowledge* because he knew God did great things in the past.
- Gideon had the **might** of the *spiritually hungry* because he wanted to see God to great works again.
- Gideon had the **might** of the *teachable* because he listened to what the angel of the Lord said.
- Gideon had the **might** of the *weak*, and God's strength is perfected in weakness.

# APRIL 19

*Judges 7-9*



**G**OD'S FEELINGS ABOUT SIN HAVE NOT CHANGED. WE ACT AS IF GOD CHANGES HIS MIND - TODAY THIS IS WRONG BUT TOMORROW IT IS OKAY.

We are only deceiving ourselves by accepting everything or even tolerant of sin. Billy Graham denotes this same perspective in the September 2011 Decision Magazine:

We in the church have failed to remind this generation that while God is love, He also has the capacity to hate. He hates sin, and he will judge it with the fierceness of his wrath. This generation is schooled in the teaching about an indulgent, soft-hearted God whose judgments are uncertain and who coddles those who break his commandments. This generation finds it difficult to believe that God hates sin.

I tell you that God hates sin just as a father hates a rattlesnake that threatens the safety and life of his child. God loathes evil and diabolic forces that would pull people down to a godless eternity just as a mother hates a venomous spider that is found playing on the soft, warm flesh of her little baby.

It is his love for man, his compassion for the human race, that prompts God to hate sin with such a vengeance. He gave Heaven's finest that we might have the best; and he loathes with a holy abhorrence anything that would hinder our being reconciled to him.

God's intolerance toward sin sent his son to die for us, and "whoever believes in him shall not perish." Come to Christ today, while the Holy Spirit is speaking to your heart!

# APRIL 20

*Judges 10-12*



**G**OD'S GREAT COMPASSION AND GRACE ARE BEYOND MEASURE. IF WE HAD BEEN IN GOD'S PLACE, WE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN AS FORGIVING.

Dawson McAllister explores understanding forgiveness:

"Forgive and forget" is how the old saying goes. But is it that simple? A boy who was dumped by his girlfriend says, "She really hurt my feelings. How can I ever forgive her for what she did to me?" A girl whose father sexually abused her for years asks, "Why should I forgive him for that?" The drug dealer who wants to turn his life around wonders, "Will God really forgive me for all I have done?" How do we forgive others who have wronged us? How do we accept God's forgiveness?

To understand how to forgive we need to understand forgiveness. There are basic elements that are required to obtain forgiveness. These include sacrifice (Hebrews 9:22), forgiveness of others (1 Corinthians 13:5, Proverbs 17:9, Matthew 6:14-15), confession of sin (2 Timothy 2:13, 1 John 1:9), and repentance (Jeremiah 15:9).

Once we understand forgiveness and forgive others then we see the promises that the Bible has for us; happiness (Psalm 32:1-2), God chooses not to hold our sins against us (Isaiah 43:25), God removes our sin from us (Psalm 103:12) and we can forgive ourselves (Philippians 3:13-14).

Are you willing to forgive others as Christ forgives us? "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14). Don't impede God's blessings by living in bitterness and resentment toward others.

# APRIL 21

*Judges 13-15*



**G**OD DEMONSTRATES HIS LOVE FOR US WHEN WE DO NOT DESERVE IT.

The “Bible In One Year,” [bibleinoneyear.org](http://bibleinoneyear.org), captures this well:

A man is walking along a road hand-in-hand with his child. The boy knows that this man is his father and that his father loves him. But suddenly the father stops, picks up the child, lifts him into his arms, embraces him, kisses him, and hugs him. Then he puts him down again, and they continue walking. It is a wonderful thing to walk along holding your father’s hand; but it is an incomparably greater thing to have his arms wrapped around you.

Samson demonstrated that when we try to live our own life, try to do it our way, our weak will gets us into trouble time and time again. We act like undisciplined children, we push the limits, knowing that our heavenly father will always love us, and he will take care of us. That is a fact; we will never fall out of the love of God. We do, however, tend to appear that we have moved a great distance away from him.

The poem, “Footprints in the Sand,” by Carolyn Carty, describes how God loves us and how he carries us during the hard times.

The LORD replied, my precious, precious child, I love you and I would never leave you! During your times of trial and suffering when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.

How could we know a love like this and keep it to ourselves? We must pray, “God, as you have been to me, so I will be to others.”

# APRIL 22

*Judges 16-17*



**T**ODAY'S READING IS VERY MUCH LIKE THE MODERN, "FOLLOW YOUR HEART" OR "LET YOUR HEART BE YOUR GUIDE" THINKING.

Modern culture regards this as the ideal state of society. Yet the Bible and common sense tell us that this kind of moral, spiritual, and social anarchy brings nothing but destruction.

- It seemed right to the eyes of Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, but God said it was wrong.
- It seemed right to the eyes of the sons of Jacob to sell Joseph into slavery, but God said it was wrong.
- It seemed right to the eyes of Nadab and Abihu to offer strange fire before the Lord, but God said it was wrong.
- It seemed right to the eyes of King David to commit adultery with Bathsheba and cover it with murder, but God said it was wrong.
- It seemed right to the eyes of Judas to betray Jesus, but God said it was wrong.

The "Enduring Word Commentary: states:

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). When man follows his own instincts, apart from the redeemed nature of the converted person, it leads to ruin. We need to follow God's way, not our own.

We look into a mirror, and are pleased with what we see, until we realize we are in a fun house. Our view of reality is skewed, miss shaped, and not accurate. We must watch our steps and our direction. Our worldview should always be grounded in God's word.

# APRIL 23

## *Judges 18*



**W**HEN IN (WHEREVER), DO AS THE (THEY) DO.  
THIS CHAPTER FULL OF DRAMA.

The tribe of Dan is seeking to expand their territory, and chooses five noble men to go and scout out the town of Laish. They met a man named Micah, not the prophet Micah, but rather a pagan with no understanding about Yahweh. They came across a young Levite who worked for Micah and recognized his accent. They inquired why he was there and his answer included all that Micah had done for him. The Danites asked him to inquire of God as to the success of their journey. Without hesitation, the Levite replied, “Go in peace. The LORD is watching over the journey you are going on.” (6). His answer had the appearance of a man who knew the LORD, but he was far from Yahweh, and using his religious activity for financial gain.

The Danites came back with 600 men, take over Laish, and changed the name to Dan. This story sounds as though God’s hand is on this tribe, but rather the opposite. The Danites adopt Micah’s cultic practices, and “set up the carved image for themselves” (30). Finally, the priest’s name is uncovered; he is “Jonathan son of Gershom, son of Moses.” Why is the grandson of Moses dabbling in the occult? What happened to the strict covenant made with the tribe of Levi calling them to serve the Lord? It can take only a generation for one family to lose their spiritual legacy.

As God had given the Israelites judges in those days, the priests could have made a big difference in the culture of the day. Instead of serving Micah for a place to live, what if Jonathan had dedicated himself to the ministry to which God had called him? When you are in a strange place, do you take advantage of opportunities to share Christ, or do you keep your mouth shut and let the nations fall to the devil?

# APRIL 24

## *Judges 19*



**L**OOKING BACK ON PAST YEARS OF MY LIFE, CULTURE SURELY SEEMS TO HAVE EXPONENTIALLY GONE DOWN THE TOILET.

My father once told me, “Don’t ever mail cash in a birthday card.” That was good advice, but recently I learned my lesson the hard way. My son had his debit card number stolen, so he had to cancel it and order another one. To help him out, I sent him some cash to the address where he had moved for college. The card didn’t show up for the longest time, and after about a month, it was finally returned to me with a bogus address. The envelope had been opened, the money was gone, and was stamped “received unsealed.” Duh! Of course, it was – someone went out of their way to open it! The stolen money was not the issue as much as the principle of stealing.

Judges 19 is a horrendous picture of the degradation of Israel in her short history. As you read this chapter, be aware that it is very disturbing because of its graphic nature. Idolatry will lead us down the path of destruction. In this story, how can a man’s wife can be sexually abused for his honor to be preserved? From where did this thought and action come? According to the “New American Commentary,” this story chronicles the “increasing Canaanization of Israelite society.” This book is a warning to all men that anyone can become as ruthless and heartless as the man who took the life of his own wife just to make a point.

Dr. Paul Chitwood, Executive Director of the KBC recently tweeted, “Louisville [KY] posts all-time record annual murder total of 112 and counting. Louisville needs the gospel.” One should not be surprised that the devil is still at work. The Bible is a book of stories of imperfect people who needed a savior!



# APRIL 25

## *Judges 20*



**B**ROTHER IS FIGHTING AGAINST BROTHER, IN JUDGES 20, BECAUSE OF ONE MAN.

The American Civil War was a terrible time of disunity, hatred, and the slaughter of thousands of men. There is a story about two Irish immigrants that settled in Charleston, SC in the 1850's. Soon after, Alexander would move to the northeast for better work. James stayed in Charleston. When the Civil War broke out, both brothers volunteered with their perspective sides. Eventually, the regiment that Alexander served made its way towards Charleston where his brother, James, still resided. One day, Unionist Alexander learned of his brother's whereabouts through a confederate prisoner and wrote these words to his wife, "We are not far from each other now ... this was a war that there never was the like of before brother against brother." Though they never saw each other, their regiments fought each other in the Battle of Secessionville, SC in 1862. Fortunately, both lived to be old men and see each other again.

Judges 20 is a book of angry tribal brothers, caused by the act of one Levite in the previous chapter. The Levite does not tell the whole truth and eventually all of Israel attacks Benjamin for the action taken against his wife. Gibeah in Benjamin is eventually overtaken, burned, and all the inhabitants are slaughtered. Those types of actions are a hard pill for us to swallow, but their decision is confirmed by the LORD as you read the story. Remember that the actions taken that day began long beforehand when Israel had made multiple bad calls.

Next time you are tempted to make a bad decision, take time to consult God, a good friend, or wise counsel. Your decision probably won't cause a national crisis, as in Judges 20, but it may keep you from fighting against your proverbial brother.

# APRIL 26

## *Judges 21*



**P**OLITICS IS A CRAZY GAME WHICH I WOULD NOT PLAY VERY WELL.

There are politicians, then there are *politicians*! You know what I mean? Certain ones seem to get away with everything – seemingly untouchable. These actions from politicians always bother me because it is like there are no rules to follow, or they change them midstream to their advantage. A few years ago, the Lord showed me that I could not fix them, because they always have certain loopholes available for any scenario of events. God is sovereign and I can only vote my convictions and let God sort the rest of it out.

Judges 21 seems to be a strange loophole for Israel's blunder. After the slaughter of the tribe of Benjamin, the Israelites look around and begin the blame game. They asked, "Why, LORD God of Israel, has it occurred that one tribe is [missing] in Israel today" (3)? For some reason, it was God's fault and he needed to fix the issue! Not once did they inquire of God what they needed to do. The tribe of Benjamin was now down to 600 cowering fighting men with no wives in which to go home. Immediately, Israel begins the burnt offering process like they had not missed a beat. From these offerings leads to more death, and destruction of another city. It is easy to ask, "Where is God in all of this?" Short answer, he is a side bar to them. God is only part of their vocabulary if they need something, but nothing about a relationship is mentioned.

The last verse of Judges 21 helps us understand the dilemma, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever he wanted." What a sad commentary for the nation whose God is the Lord! Stop right now, and pray that America would never become the nation that completely ignores God and his truth for us.

# APRIL 27

## *Judges Conclusion*



**F**AILURES CAN SIDETRACK US FROM WHAT GOD WANTS TO DO THROUGH US.

“For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight” (Hebrews 11:32-34).

Two of the most fascinating and unique, if not bizarre, characters, Gideon and Samson, are stories of weakness and strength. Gideon goes from weakness to strength; Samson goes from strength to weakness. They are useful to God in very important ways. Both of these men are identified in the Bible as judges.

In case you don’t remember all of the judges, here are the rest: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, Samson, Eli, and Samuel. By the way, Deborah was accompanied by a man named Barak, who is also mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11. These were human deliverers the Lord raised up to maintain his covenant faithfulness with Abraham so that the Jews were not wiped out. It is an act of faithfulness on God’s part, as well as an act of compassion and grace against the horribly black backdrop of pitiful human compromise, twisted acts of sin, and idolatry. (Grace to You)

We see flaws in each judge, some major weaknesses and failures. This reminds how God has delivered us. The judges are great demonstration of a quality of faith and trust which we so desperately need. It should renew and refresh us.

# APRIL 28

## *Ruth 1*



**T**HE BOOK OF RUTH SHOWS THAT GOD'S REDEEMING LOVE EXTENDS TO ALL PEOPLE.

This beautiful book, Ruth, is like a calmness in the middle of a turbulent storm, when reminiscing on all the violence and enemy invasions recorded in the books of Joshua and Judges. The book of Ruth deals more with real life in ancient Israel and not necessarily the warfare in the previous book, although the events actually took place during the period of the Judges. The date that the book was written is not given, and there is no mention as to who the author is, but it is most likely Samuel, who is the traditionally accepted author. The book of Ruth traces the messianic line of King David back to Ruth, who was a Moabitess, and the book gives us a beautiful understanding of how God rewards faithfulness and devotion. (Bible History Online, [bible-history.com](http://bible-history.com))

Ruth was the daughter-in-law who stayed behind with Naomi. To a Jewish audience, Ruth had three strikes against her. She's a Moabite, regarded as a cursed people, she's widowed, and she's poor.

"[Naomi] said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.' But Ruth said, 'Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you'" (Ruth 1:16-17).

This is great picture of conversion. Have you been redeemed? You can come just as you are.

# APRIL 29

*Ruth 2-3*



**H**AVING DEDICATED HERSELF TO THE GOD OF ISRAEL, RUTH BEGINS TO GROW IN HER RELATIONSHIP AND DEDICATION TO BOAZ.

In Ruth we see the attitude and character of one in whom God is pleased. And through humility and dependence, Ruth begins to grow in grace. This chapter also displays the gracious provision and protection that comes from Boaz.

We have seen the commitment of Ruth in her determination to follow the true God. We have also seen her grow in her relationship with Boaz, consistently relying upon his grace.

Chapter 3 is all about refining, rest, and rewards. As a Christian grows, their faith has got to be tried and refined. Our faith is of little use to anyone until this has happened. This chapter doesn't leave us there, as it also shows us the rest and fruit that is produced in such a time.

We are reminded that we continue to grow in grace as we exercise in humility and our dependence on God. The more we lose ourselves and focus on God, then the more evident God's grace is in our lives. This is done through the process of refining, where we need to have more of God and less of self. Judges gives a picture of how Israel was supposed to love others in response to God's love for them.

"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1).

Those who have been redeemed by Jesus ought to become redeemers of others. Have you offered yourself to be used by God?

# APRIL 30

## *Ruth 4*



**T**HIS LAST CHAPTER IN RUTH IS ALL ABOUT REDEMPTION, OR ‘DELIVERANCE FROM SOME EVIL BY PAYMENT OF A PRICE’ (NEW BIBLE DICTIONARY).

In fact, “redemption” is used 23 times in Ruth. For the Christian, our positional redemption is completely past tense – we have been redeemed. Done and dusted, nothing will ever change that. Jesus has purchased us from our place of slavery to sin, Satan, and the world.

As we live our lives on earth, there is also an ongoing practical redemption in which, having been freed from the penalty of sin, we are still being delivered from the power of sin. Ruth in this chapter finds herself in the same predicament. There is a conflict over where her redemption will come from and in picture form I believe that this chapter answers questions about our deliverance as well.

### **Ruth 4 helps us answer:**

- Where does our ongoing redemption comes from?
- What is the purpose of the law?
- What part does the law now play in our Christian life?
- How does freedom lead to fruitfulness?

We see in Ruth 4 the power and need for redemption and the reason for the law and how we fall under it. We see this as anticipation of the work of Jesus the Messiah.

We were created to be God’s children, to forever be in his presence, but we gave it away through sin. However, Jesus, our kinsman redeemer, loved us, even in our sin, and redeemed our inheritance back. God sees us like Boaz saw Ruth. He loved us just as we were.

# MAY 1

## *1 Samuel 1:1-20*



**I**T'S AMAZING HOW FAST WE TURN TO OTHER THINGS WHEN WE NEED COMFORT, HELP, OR HEALING.

1 Samuel begins by introducing a barren women named Hannah who was married to Elkanah. Elkanah had two wives; Peninah, who had children, and Hannah.

We do not know the exact medical reasons for Hannah's infertility, but we see that ultimately it was the Lord who, "had closed her womb" (5). The Scriptures explicitly remind believers that we are all going to go through, "trials of various kinds" (James 1:2).

Trials can reveal a lot about character and commitment to Christ. When trials come some people walk away from God, while others grow closer to God during times of suffering. In verses 7-9, we see how Hannah first responds. She "wept and would not eat." Hannah wanted a child so badly that her infertility led her into a deep depression. However, Hannah's faith in God's faithfulness would not keep her down. Hannah "rose" and went to the temple to pray (9). Hannah's prayer demonstrated her faith in God's ability to change her circumstance. She knew God hears the cries of his people.

When you are going through a difficult situation, what do you do? Who do you turn to? Culture teaches that when you have a bad day then you should turn on a good TV show with your favorite comfort foods. Hannah give us a great model of how we are to deal with our trials. She brings her suffering to the Lord in prayer. Prayer often reveals what we treasure the most. You have a God who is personal and he cares for you. Peter writes, "Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7)

Take some time today to cast all your anxieties upon Jesus. Let him help you through your sufferings.

# MAY 2

*1 Samuel 1:12-28*



**H**OW WOULD YOU RESPOND IF GOD ASKED YOU TO GIVE AWAY YOUR GREATEST TREASURE?

What is the most valuable thing in your life? Is it some type of material or possession? Maybe a car, house or a family heirloom. Maybe your treasure is not a possession but a relationship. Maybe it's your spouse, children or a really close friend.

We left off with Hannah's story of suffering and sadness. She had been barren for many years. Year after year she would faithfully visit the temple to pray and make a sacrifice to God. Year after year she would come home with God answering, "no."

Finally, Hannah's time had come. After all these years of begging the Lord, he was now ready to give Hannah a child. Hannah, "conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel" (20).

Try to put yourself in Hannah's situation. She had been barren for many years and she finally has a child of her own. If we are honest, most of us would probably become over protective of this child. After waiting all these years for this child to come, we would do whatever is possible to make sure nothing terrible happens to our only child. But what Hannah does next is a powerful testimony of her trust in God. Instead of becoming an overprotective mother, she "lent him to the Lord" (27).

Hannah's willingness to give her only son to the Lord points us to what our Heavenly Father did for us. God the father, gave his only son to us so that we would not perish but have eternal life. This is a reminder of where all good things ultimately come from. It is the Lord who gives and takes away (Job 1:21).

May we be a blessing to others as we have been blessed by God.



# MAY 3

## *1 Samuel 2:1-11*



**H**ANNAH'S SONG STARTS WITH THE WORD "MY," WHICH IS REPEATED THREE TIMES IN VERSE 1.

After that, her focus shifts to "the Lord," and is mentioned nine times in the song. He is the actor in this song. He is in control.

Hannah concludes her song with these words, "He will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed" (10). These may sound like strange words coming from a new mother but these words help us to better understand God's bigger plan. Hannah is praying for God to give strength to his king. There is only one problem with Hannah's desire, there was no king in Israel. Who could Hannah be speaking about?

What Hannah's song says is this: God's king is coming and when he comes, he will turn the world upside down. Hannah was barren and God gave her a son named Samuel. All throughout history, God has chosen barren women to play a key part in the bloodline of Christ. Many years later, there is another baby boy born. This baby is born, not to a barren woman, but to a virgin! Just like Hannah, Mary sings a song in response to her conception. Mary's magnificat, in Luke 1, is almost an exact reconstruction of Hannah's song.

Both rejoice in God's provision, but see it as a picture of what God will do for his people. Hannah perfectly understands that the gifts God gives to us are not solely for our own pleasure. Samuel was given to Hannah for a greater purpose.

What has God placed in your hands that he may be desiring to use for a greater purpose? Have you dedicated your child to the Lord's work, or are you still clinging to your plan for your child?

# MAY 4

## *1 Samuel 3*



**C**OULD YOU RECOGNIZE THE VOICE OF GOD? MAYBE NOT THE AUDIBLE VOICE OF GOD, BUT IS GOD'S WRITTEN WORDS FAMILIAR TO YOUR EARS?

Throughout the years, there have been a number of actors who have become famous because of their voice. You can recognize the sound of their voice without ever looking at the television. It is distinct.

In Chapter 3, Samuel hears the voice of God for the first time. Because he had never heard the voice of God prior to this night, he was confused to where the voice was coming from. Three times he runs and wakes up Eli, confusing the voice of God for the voice of Eli. Three times Eli assures Samuel that he has said nothing. Finally, Eli realizes that God is speaking to Samuel and instructs Samuel to return to his bed and if he hears the voice again, say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

The Lord came and stood, calling as other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears."

Baptists have been known as people of the book. This is a great compliment to the Baptist heritage. We are people of the book. We do cherish the written words of God. But it is amazing how we, just like Samuel, can mix up the voices we hear.

Samuel heard the voice of God and got up out of his bed. He had a desire to hear from God. Let us not forget that God has spoken to us through his word. But how often do we just roll over and ignore the very words of God. Instead we listen the voice of comfort and convenience. We listen to what the world says about success. As Baptists, may we be doers of the word and not hearers only.

# MAY 5

*1 Samuel 8:1-9*



**S**OMETIMES THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE ARE FOUND DIRECTLY UNDER OUR NOSE. YET WE OFTEN THINK THE GRASS IS GREENER ON THE OTHER SIDE.

Samuel faces the discontentment of the Israelites. They want, “a king to judge us like all the nations.” The Lord had been faithful to his covenant. He had brought Israel from slaves in Egypt to free men in the land of Israel. When they were hungry in the wilderness, he fed them with manna. When they were thirsty in the desert, he gave them water from a rock. When they were afraid of the battle across the Jordan river, God brought down the walls of Jericho.

Without question, God delivered Israel from their enemies but now they want a king like the other nations.

This is like the girl who is going through a breakup and confiding in her best male friend. She shares how she is just looking for someone who understands her, who won’t take advantage of her, and someone who is kind. The entire time she is venting her emotions, the guy is standing by just thinking, “everything you are looking for is right here. Wake up and see it!” Then the girl turns to her friend and asks, “Do you have any friends that would go out with me?”

This is basically what Israel is doing to God. He has been so good to Israel. He has rescued them time after time from their mess. And now they want a king like the other nations. God had been their king the entire time but as they look at the other nations, they think it would be better if they were like everyone else. They believed the grass was greener on the other side.

How has God shown his faithfulness in your life? How have you have seen God work. What are some ways that you could confess where you believe the grass might be greener?

# MAY 6

*1 Samuel 8:10-22*



## **H**AVE YOU EVER TAKEN A RELATIONSHIP FOR GRANTED?

In the second half of this chapter, the Israelites have acknowledged they do not see God's hand in their history. After being warned what would happen if they had a king like the other nations, the people of Israel said, "No! But there shall be a king over us, that we also maybe like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."

Can you imagine how these words must have troubled God? The people of Israel wanted a king who would fight their battles. This is exactly what God has been doing since the Red Sea. He has continued to fight their battles. But now they have taken his provision for granted. Israel did not need a king like the other nations. They already have a king, and this king is unlike the kings of the other nations.

It's amazing how quick we can look at the Israelites and see how foolish they were, but if we are honest, we are not that different from them. How often have we seen the Lord provide for us and yet we often do we take his provisions for granted. We often desire to be like the other nations. We don't trust that God has been providing for us and we begin to turn to the advice the world offers.

The scariest part of Chapter 8 is found in verse 22, "And the Lord said to Samuel, "Obey their voice and make them a king." There comes a point where God finally just gives the Israelites the desires of their heart. It is important that we not ascribe to others what rightfully belongs to God.

How are you taking your relationship with the Lord for granted? What are you turning to instead of God?

# MAY 7

## *1 Samuel 13*



### **H**AVE YOU EVER DONE SOMETHING WHERE THE **OUTCOME HAS IMPACTED SOMEONE ELSE?**

We see King Saul believing that he does not have to play by the same rules as others. There were clear, distinct rules for the different Old Testament offices. Kings were not to be priests or prophets, priests were not to be prophets or kings, and prophets were not to be kings or priests. Saul knew his role as king meant he had no business offering a burnt offering. Saul had become impatient while waiting for Samuel to show up, so he took matters into his own hands.

When Samuel arrived, he questioned Saul, “What have you done?...You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue.”

God allows Saul to remain king, but he takes the kingdom away from his descendants. It is important that we realize that there are consequences to our actions. We see that God has sought out another man. This man would be a man after God’s own heart (14). The irony here is that Saul’s son, Jonathan, could have been a great king. Jonathan was a man after God’s heart. Unlike his father, Jonathan had a deep desire to honor God and to put him first. But because of Saul’s disobedience, Jonathan will never have the chance to be king.

When you are making decisions in your life, do you factor how this impacts the lives of others? Who could you hurt by making this choice? Saul was so full of pride he could not see how one sin might impact the longevity of his kingdom. What decisions are you currently making that might be hurting others? What decisions are you making in your marriage may be impacting your spouse and your children?

# MAY 8

## *1 Samuel 15*



**H**OW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU STARTED A PROJECT AROUND THE HOUSE AND IT REMAINS 95 PERCENT COMPLETE? HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU BEEN CONTENT TO LEAVE IT AT 95 PERCENT?

Saul has been given a task to complete. God tells Saul to, “Go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have.” Saul decided to not be 100 percent obedient, and to do *most* of what God had commanded him. Partial obedience is still complete disobedience. Saul disobeyed God by keeping some of the sheep and oxen along with the king. He justified his disobedience by telling Samuel that “the people” kept some of the spoil so we could sacrifice to the Lord (21).

Samuel confronts Saul on two levels. First, Saul is blame shifting. The king should be able to tell his people what to do and they should be obedient. Second, Samuel informs Saul that God would rather you just be obedient and destroy the sheep than be disobedient and make a sacrifice. “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams” (22).

Saul focused on his 95 percent obedience, and is trying to pass the blame for the 5 percent disobedience. Likewise, we often overlook our own sin simply because we have not sinned as bad as others.

We compare and say, “I would never have an affair,” or “I have never murdered anyone,” but have you cheated on your taxes? Have you had someone clock out for you? Have you gone over on your lunch break? These are just a few ways where we can be partially disobedient. James 2:10 reminds us that God expects 100 percent obedience. Take time to thank God for the obedience of Christ. In Christ’s perfect obedience, we now become fully obedient in the eyes of God!

# MAY 9

*1 Samuel 15:24-35*



**A**RACHNOPHOBIA IS THE GREATEST FEAR AMONG AMERICANS - 48 PERCENT OF WOMEN AND 12 PERCENT OF MEN ARE FEARFUL OF SPIDERS.

Our fears can keep us from being obedient. In Chapter 15, we see Saul being partially obedient to the plan that God had given him. Saul completed most of what God had instructed him to do but his disobedience ultimately led God to take away his throne.

Saul confesses, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice” (24). Why was Saul disobedient, and not fully carry out God’s mission? We can see the answer in his own confession. Saul disobeyed because he feared the people and obeyed their voice. Whatever we fear will ultimately control us. Our fear of seeing or confronting a spider controls the our physical behavior.

This is what happened when the Israelites were in the wilderness. Moses was preparing them to enter the Promised Land. Before they entered the land he sent twelve spies to see what the land was like. Ten spies came back afraid of the other peoples strength. But two spies, Joshua and Caleb, returned ready to be fully obedient. Their response was, “Do not rebel against the Lord. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread to us” (Numbers 13:9).

Joshua and Caleb’s fear of God led them to be fully obedient. God had control of their life because they had a right view of fear.

Jesus reminds us of where our fears should be, “do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

In what ways are you being disobedient? How can you trace this disobedience to a wrong placement of fear?

# MAY 10

## *2 Samuel 1-2*



**I**F YOU HAD TO PICK YOUR ONE OR TWO BEST FRIENDS, WHO WOULD THEY BE?

What makes them your best friends? What would life be like if they were no longer around to keep you company?

That's what David faced with the death of his best friend, Jonathan. They were so close that the Bible tells us they shared each other's clothes. So we can easily see why David was so heartbroken when he heard the news that Jonathan was killed in battle. There are few greater pains than the death of your best friend.

But we see David mourning over Saul who was bound and determined to have David killed. Because of Saul, David had to flee the country, was unable to be there for his father Jesse during his later years, and spent over a decade hiding out in the wilderness, living much like a hunted animal. Saul had killed David's priestly friends, deceived David again and again, and was David's mortal enemy!

Yet, David mourns the death of the king who hated him. David even writes a song in Saul's honor:

Saul and Jonathan—in life they were loved and admired, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions (1:23).

It is remarkable that David found nice things to say about the man who hated him. David highlighted Saul's positive attributes.

Find positive things to say about others. Jesus said to "bless those who curse you" (Luke 6:28). It does no good to attack those who attack us, especially after they have been removed from their position of authority over us. May we all show grace to those who fail to show grace to us. In doing so, we are much like our Lord Jesus.



# MAY 11

*2 Samuel 3-5; 1 Chronicles 11*



**H**AVE YOU EVER BEEN HURT SOMEONE? WORSE YET, HAS SOMEONE HURT SOMEONE YOU LOVED?

It is easy to forgive someone who attacks me, but when someone says something about my wife and children, I get angry. Sometimes I want to take revenge upon the people who have hurt the people I love.

God had anointed David to be the next king of Israel, yet one of Saul's sons, Ish-Bosheth, tried to become king instead. Ish-Bosheth wasn't a good leader and his top general, Abner, decided to join David's quest to become king. There was only one problem, Abner had killed the brother of David's top general, Joab. If Joab could have forgiven Abner, David would have had two incredible generals to lead the Lord's army in triumph over God's enemies. Instead, Joab was still angry at Abner for killing his brother.

So what did Joab do? He acted like he was going to be kind to Abner, but as soon as they got alone, Joab killed him as an act of revenge.

We can say, "Well, Abner got what he deserved," and that would be a true statement. However, that doesn't mean Joab did the right thing. God says, "Vengeance is mine ... for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly" (Deuteronomy 32:35). We don't need to take revenge on those who have hurt us or our loved ones. We need to leave justice up to God.

Though good friends, David chastised Joab for taking revenge. He warned Joab that because he had not shown mercy to Abner, that God might not show mercy upon Abner's family. "May [Abner's] blood fall on the head of Joab and on his whole family! May Joab's family never be without someone who has a running sore or leprosy or who leans on a crutch or who falls by the sword or who lacks food." In other words, we are better off leaving revenge to God.

# MAY 12

*2 Samuel 6; 1 Chronicles 16*



**N**O MATTER HOW BAD THINGS BECAME, DAVID ALWAYS HAD GOD'S PROMISE OF KINGSHIP.

For nearly 20 years, David knew he was going to be the king, but it didn't happen overnight. He started out a hero with Goliath, but then arose a great conflict with Saul and for the next 10-12 years. Instead of living in a palace and sleeping on a fluffy pillow, he was living in caves sleeping on a rock. His life was in constant danger. David was always on the run. It had to be a miserable existence.

He knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that God had his hand on David's life. He knew he wasn't going to die but sometimes David probably thought that death was better than the life he was living.

One day it happened. Saul was killed in battle. David did not celebrate Saul's death, but he had to see the door was open to fulfill his destiny and become the king of Israel. The roadblocks keeping David from his throne were wiped away. Not only could David rule, he could establish a dynasty whereby God would be worshiped in all of Israel. Not just anywhere, but on the holy hill of Mount Zion, the place where Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac, the holy city of Jerusalem!

Two decades of frustration were culminated into one exuberant day of worship. The ark of the covenant, the symbol of God's blessing and presence in Israel, was ascending to its rightful place. It was a worship extravaganza. The young king couldn't contain his enthusiasm. He wanted everyone to know the blessing of the Lord.

Unfortunately, some people didn't appreciate David's exuberant worship. They thought worship has to be solemn and quiet. (There's nothing wrong with that if that's how God is leading you to worship.) For David, on that day, worship was a party! Worship was so intense that he went just a little bit wild. God was pleased.

# MAY 13

*2 Samuel 7-10; 1 Chronicles 16-18*



**D**O YOU LIKE IT WHEN PEOPLE SAY GOOD THINGS ABOUT YOU?

Have you ever wanted to be famous? Do you want people to think well of you?

We think having ambition is a bad thing. That's not always the case. God is in the business of making our name great when we go about the business of making God's name great. We lift up his name and he lifts us up. We humble ourselves in service to him and he promotes us in the presence of our enemies (James 4:10; Psalm 23). God made Abraham's name great (Genesis 12:1-3) and in 2 Samuel 7, God promises King David to make his name great as well.

2 Samuel 7:10-12 is one of the most important and encouraging sections in all of the Bible. God reminds David that he brought him out of the shepherds fields and made him into a king. God promises to make the name of Israel great, and do something special for David's descendants.

Has there even been a time where David's descendants have lived in peace, in their own place, and they experienced even 100 years without anyone bothering them? Have the Jews lived in any extended period of peace? Of course not. This is a prophecy yet to be fulfilled. But make no mistake. It will come to pass.

There are two ways that God promises to make David's name great here. 1. He will give David's nation (Israel) an eternal land of peace and prosperity. 2. One of David's descendants will rule that kingdom.

That's a promise of Christ and his Kingdom. It's an unconditional promise. And someday, when Jesus comes back, God's covenant will be fulfilled.

# MAY 14

## *2 Samuel 11*



**O**ther than Jesus Christ, more chapters are devoted to the life of David than anyone else in the Bible.

David was a great warrior, gifted leader, poet laureate, faithful son, accomplished composer, and instrumentalist. The Bible even tells us he was very handsome. David had it all.

Yet, even though God gave David just about everything he could ever want, the world was not enough. One evening he is sitting on his rooftop and looking down, he saw the wife of one of his most dedicated soldiers. She was taking a bath on her rooftop. David saw her, and instead of walking back into his house, he continued to watch.

It is said that nothing tastes as sweet as forbidden fruit. That may be true at first, but forbidden fruit, no matter how sweet to taste, will turn to bitterness in our stomachs. He invited young Bathsheba, to come to his palace. The two of them became physical together and she became pregnant with his baby. David attempted to cover it up, all the way to the point of having her husband killed in battle. But God knew, and others would find out as well.

In David's time, most kings went out to fight battles in the early spring. We see David's armies going out to battle, but David decided to stay at home instead of being out leading his men. All of the bad things that happen to David in chapter 11 are a result of being home when he should have been somewhere else. He was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Half the battle of fighting temptation is to avoid the temptation altogether. Jesus prayed, "lead us not into temptation." When at all possible, avoid any opportunity to make a bad decision. Stay away from trouble instead of placing yourself in a position to fail.

# MAY 15

## 2 Samuel 12



**I**T IS EASY TO SEE SOMEONE ELSE'S SIN BUT NOT OUR OWN.

David had done everything in his power to conceal his sin with Bathsheba, but word still got out. She was pregnant with David's child. It looked like they were going to get away with it, but God spoke to the prophet Nathan and he tricked David into casting judgment on himself.

"There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." (1-4)

David was incensed. "Only a terrible person would do such a thing," he thought. David said the rich man deserved to lose four sheep for the one who took from the poor man. Sadly, when David passed a sentence on the rich man, he was actually convicting himself. David lost four of his own sons, including the child that was a result of his affair with Bathsheba.

We must watch how we use our words to judge others; they might be used against us. Jesus says we must watch how we judge others "for with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you" (Matthew 7:2).

# MAY 16

*2 Samuel 13-19*



**L**EADERSHIP IS HARD. THE LARGER THE GROUP YOU'RE LEADING, THE TOUGHER IT BECOMES.

Leadership is fraught with difficult decisions and no matter how hard you try, you'll never make people happy. Monday morning quarterbacks say they would have done things differently. When things go wrong, everybody likes to say, "I told you so."

But when you're in charge, you don't get the luxury of second-guessing. Whether it's the President in the White House, questioning your parents, or even church members criticizing their local pastor, the people not in leadership never know the whole story. It's easy to sit on the outside looking in, judging the leadership for every little mistake they make.

This is what Absalom was doing to his own father. When people expressed dissatisfaction with how David was ruling the nation, Absalom, with his eyes on his father's throne, was all too eager to criticize his father. "Well, if I were in charge, I'd do it this way." Or, "I would have never made that stupid decision. We'd all be better off with a new person at the helm."

Leadership is hard. In my years as an associate pastor I would sometimes wonder why our senior pastor would make certain decisions that I didn't understand. A few years after I left the church I asked him why he made those decisions and he informed me of a lot of information that I didn't know. At the time, his decisions made no sense to me. Once I had all the information, I realized just how wise my pastor was.

Let's be careful when we speak out against our leaders. Perhaps we should do like the Bible says, and instead of criticizing them, we pray that they have more wisdom instead.

# MAY 17

*2 Samuel 20-24; 1 Chronicles 11-21*



**O**NE OF THE GREATEST EVIDENCES OF A WELL-LIVED LIFE IS LEAVING A LEGACY THAT BENEFITS THE WORLD FOR YEARS TO COME.

Though David was one of the greatest warriors in the history of Israel, his victories on the battlefield will not be his legacy. He was fairly rich, but there would be richer men. He was certainly popular with the ladies, but that won't be his legacy either.

No, the legacy of David is his music. We call them Psalms. When David was going through the best of times, and difficult times, he wrote lots of songs. When he would go to worship God, he would write even more songs. The Holy Spirit so inspired David, that there are over 100 all-time top hits that are still sung around the world. It's difficult to overstate the impact of King David's music.

In American lore, Elvis was known as "The King." He even has his own channel on satellite radio. In the 80s, there was a new face atop the Billboard Top 40. Known as the "King of Pop," Michael Jackson broke nearly every record with concerts and record sales.

Ask someone born after 1980 to name you five Elvis songs and they will struggle. Ask someone born after 1990 to name 5 Michael Jackson songs, and they will likely strain as well. More than three thousand years after his death, it's difficult to go through one church service without singing or reading lyrics to one of David's songs!

One of the major differences between our modern "kings" of music and David is that modern songwriters often pen words their own glory. That's why, just 20 years after their death, few remember the songs of Elvis and Michael Jackson. David's songs, in contrast, glorify our eternal Savior. The glory of man fades away, but the glory of God is everlasting.

# MAY 18

*1 Kings 1-3; 1 Chron. 22-29; 2 Chron. 1*



**I**F GOD OFFERED YOU ANYTHING YOU WANTED, ANYTHING AT ALL, WHAT WOULD YOU REQUEST?

We've all heard fictitious stories about the genie in a bottle granting magical wishes to a lucky individual. But in Solomon's case, it really happened! God said, "ask what I shall give you" (1 Kings 3:5). After all, God is all-powerful. He had the ability to fulfill all of Solomon's dreams! The whole world was being laid at his feet.

But instead of asking for the things of the world, Solomon recognized that as a young man he did not have the necessary knowledge or experience to rule a nation. So what did he do? He asked God to give him the wisdom to rule his people wisely.

That was perhaps the wisest choice Solomon ever made. Not only did God make him one of the smartest men to ever live, he was so pleased with Solomon's choice that he gave him riches as well. "I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days" (1 Kings 3:13).

Later in Solomon's life he writes, "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight" (Proverbs 4:7). Solomon recognized at an early age that wisdom, being able to discern what is best, knowing the difference between right and wrong, is the most important thing anyone could ever possess. It's not just a matter of knowing what sin is and isn't, it's also the ability to see two good choices and choosing the best option available.

Sometimes when faced with a big decision people ask, "Is there anything wrong with \_\_\_\_\_?" That's the wrong question. A key to life is making every decision by answering the question, "What is the wise thing to do?" That's what Solomon did, and God rewarded him for it.



# MAY 19

*1 Kings 4-10; 2 Chronicles 2-8*



**P**LEASE DO NOT MISS THIS POINT. SOLOMON COMPLETED THE LORD'S TEMPLE BEFORE HE COMPLETED HIS PALACE.

Since the beginning of time, people have offered their treasure for that which they worship. Whether it's a \$3,000 ticket to see the Cubs play in the World Series, \$65,000 for a pickup truck, or \$800 for a one night prom dress, people are willing to drop the cash for things they value.

The new football stadium for the Dallas Cowboys is an amazing piece of architecture. Coming in at just over a billion dollars, it is known worldwide as one of the most expensive sports venues in the world. Some even call it the "Temple in Arlington."

God blessed Solomon with wisdom and riches. The king needed a palace. He needed an army. The country needed infrastructure. Solomon would commit to all of those necessary things, but the first thing we see Solomon building is a temple to our almighty God. As we read the detailed account of the building of the temple, just the gold and silver would have cost over \$250 billion in today's currency. That's a quarter of a trillion! That's 250 Cowboy football palaces.

May I ask you this question? Does your offering to the work of the Lord take priority over your own home? How about that car/truck payment? For Solomon, the wisest of the wise, he knew that he would have nothing except for the generosity of the Lord. God's worship must always take place first. As has been the case since the beginning of creation, people will give to what they worship. When you look at your expenditures, what or who are you worshiping the most today?

# MAY 20

*1 Kings 11; 2 Chronicles 9*



**E**VERYONE HAS THE PROVERBIAL ACHILLES' HEEL. WE ALL HAVE OUR WEAKNESSES.

For Solomon, the wisest of the wise, it wasn't money or power. It wasn't pride, evil, anger or even gluttony; he certainly had the exposure to all of these temptations. The gift of wisdom helped him not to sin when confronted with the desire to turn things of the world into idolatrous gain. He just liked the ladies. He liked them too much.

God had warned Israel not to marry with people of different faiths (Deuteronomy 7:3). He even gave the specific reason why. "Because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." The key word there is "surely." God is letting his people know that it's just about impossible to be intimately in love with someone and not share the thing you love the most. We can say we love God with all of our hearts, but if we are sharing our hearts with someone who doesn't love God, it will divide our loyalty between two loves. It's only natural to want to love that which your spouse loves. God designed us that way. We are meant to share what we love with the ones that we love.

That's exactly what happened with Solomon. Unfortunately, his pagan wives loved other gods. Solomon began splitting his worship between the true God of heaven and the false gods of creation.

It has been said that if the wise King Solomon couldn't handle being in close relationships with unbelievers, then we should never be so arrogant as to believe we will fare any better. As the apostle Paul wisely directed the disciples at Corinth, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." The most intimate people in our lives must share our love for Christ and his kingdom.

# MAY 21

*1 Kings 12-16; 2 Chronicles 10-14*



**T**HE GREAT FIRE OF 1910, ALSO KNOWN AS THE “BIG BURN,” IS BELIEVED TO BE THE LARGEST FOREST FIRE IN U.S. HISTORY.

The fire encompassed more than 3 million acres in Idaho, Montana and Washington — that’s larger than all the land space from the Ohio River to Charleston. Because of the remoteness of the regions, firefighters just let the fires burn, but soon the fire grew out of control, destroying entire villages. Thousands of firefighters were called from around the nation to get it under control. By the time it was over, more than 78 firefighters lost their lives to a fire that could have been quenched if it had been addressed in its earlier stages.

Idolatry, the worship of anything other than the almighty God, can get out of control quickly, and rapidly destroy a life, a family, a church, and even a nation.

Once Solomon allowed foreign wives to worship other gods in Israel, the entire nation sought other idols. Before long, the nation was ravaged by civil war, had split into two competing nations, and both were far more impotent than the earlier days of Solomon’s rule. In fact, idol worship got so out of control, every single king of Israel worshiped false gods. Only a handful of the kings of Judah followed God at all. Instead of Israel being a light unto the nations, it had become the home to child sacrifice, rampant drug use, prostitution, sexual immorality, and corrupt political systems.

When you see a nation falling victim to said ills, you can be sure there is an idolatry problem. People are searching for something to fill the God-sized hole in their lives with the things of the world, but only God can give them what they need. People are worshipers in our nation. It’s just that they are worshiping the wrong things.

# MAY 22

*1 Kings 17-18; 2 Chronicles 15-18*



**C**AN YOU IMAGINE HAVING BAD PRESIDENTS FOR OVER 200 YEARS? WHAT WOULD OUR COUNTRY LOOK LIKE?

James Madison was a Founding Father, the fourth president of the United States, and recognized as the primary author of the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

What if every single president since James Madison was a bad president, prayed to pagan gods, and openly rejected Jesus? That's how bad the nation of Israel became after King Solomon. For 200 years, bad king followed bad king, only to be followed by another bad king. How would God straighten out that mess?

Throughout history, when God wants to fix a problem, he usually rises up a man to stand in the gap and speak forth his Word. The people who God calls to speak his Word were called prophets. The chief of the Old Testament prophets was a man named Elijah, meaning, "my God is Yahweh." What a powerful name in a nation that worshiped false gods. There is only one true God, Yahweh.

God's miracle on Mt. Carmel is a small picture of how powerful God is over the false gods of the world. In 1 Kings 18 we see 850 false teachers lining up against one prophet of God. The great news of this story is this equation: 1 prophet + 1 true God > 850 false prophets of false gods. Elijah defeated all of them because he had the power of God behind him.

No matter what we see going on in our nation, always remember, "If God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31)? Our God is greater!

# MAY 23

*1 Kings 19-20; 2 Chronicles 19-20*



**W**HO AMONG US HASN'T GIVEN OUR BEST EFFORT TO PLEASE THE LORD THEN SOMEONE TEARS US DOWN WITH A DISHEARTENING WORD?

Just after his mountaintop experience on Carmel, Elijah encounters the evil Queen Jezebel. Though he had been serving the Lord with might and power, a discouraging word from her sent him into a dark depression. Words and threats can hurt and debilitate.

Elijah responds to Jezebel with fear. Every time he thought he was making a difference in the world, something bad would happen to make him think that there was no hope. The prophet had become near suicidal. "If only God would take my life," he thought, "Heaven has to be better than what I'm dealing with down here ..."

After a long nap, Elijah awoke to find that God had prepared a hot meal for him. When worn out from the travails of life, the best thing we can do is get a good night's sleep and a hot meal. Our spiritual well-being is often directly related to our physical well-being.

With Elijah's physical needs addressed, God tells him to get up on his feet and spend some time with a friend, Elisha. Even though Elijah was having himself a pity party, feeling like he was the only one trying to live out a godly life, God reminded him that there were still 7,000 other preachers in Israel who were preaching the Word of God.

May this passage be encouraging. Though our culture seems to be heading in the wrong direction, we have sister churches and fellow pastors who are out there preaching the Word every day. There are many Christians in West Virginia who are reading this same word of encouragement. You are not alone, my friend. We have each other, and if God be for us, who can be against us. Get some rest, eat a healthy meal, and get up off of that mat. You've got friends who need you!

# MAY 24

## *1 Kings 21-22*



**T**HE MOST WICKED LEADER IN THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL WAS NOT BEYOND GOD'S ABILITY TO GRANT GRACE!

King Ahab was a Jew who married poorly. His wife Jezebel was the daughter of Baal worshippers. Typically in the Old Testament, Baal is thought to be Satan himself. So here you have someone from the chosen race of God married to a devil worshiper. Not only that, Jezebel worshiped demonic goddesses as well.

Their marriage was total disaster! Ahab sat passively by as Jezebel killed off godly priests, persecuted Elijah, established Baal worship in all of Israel, promoted religious prostitution and child sacrifice, and stealing land from faithful neighbors by making false accusations against them and using her position in government to ensure that anyone who opposed her would be killed. Sometimes you get glimpses of Ahab wanting to do the right thing, but, he allowed his wife's counsel to turn his heart away from the Lord.

Toward the end of his life, Ahab listened to Elijah when he was confronted by his sin. Ahab realized just how much wrong he had done, and even though God had planned on destroying Ahab right away, God gave him a second chance when Ahab repented of his sins. God's grace is truly greater than all of our sin!

Sadly, Ahab made more poor decisions in his future that led to his untimely death. However, God was always there, waiting for Ahab to admit his sin and lead Israel to righteousness once again. Yes, we serve a God of second, third, fourth and fifth chances.

No matter where you've been, no matter what you've done, you can call out to the Lord to forgive you and set you on the right path. He is truly a God of the greatest mercy! His love endures forever.

# MAY 25

*2 Kings 2:1-18*



**O**NE OF THE GREAT NEEDS IN THE CHURCH IS FOR DISCIPLESHIP.

In a culture that is so dysfunctional and in need of strong leadership, it is critical for mature Christians to mentor and disciple younger Christians. Part of that discipleship process is to guide younger believers in the knowledge of the Scriptures, but it is also the responsibility of the mentor to bring the disciple to the point of spiritually leading.

We see that process between Elijah and Elisha. “Tell me what I can do for you before I am taken from you” (9). It was probably difficult for Elijah to give up his position of importance and pass it on to someone else, but that’s what good, spiritual leaders do.

Elisha became just that kind of leader. The miracle of healing the water at Jericho was similar to a miracle that God enable Moses to performed for the Israelites in the wilderness, and one that Elijah performed at Mount Carmel (Exodus 15:23, 1 Kings 18:42–45).

If we are going to impact and change our culture, we must make disciples who learn to lead and make other disciples. Who are you able to disciple?

**Take these steps:**

1. Spend time with them on a regular basis.
2. Study the Bible together to glean both information and inspiration. Ask, “What does God mean by this passage?”
3. Find ways to allow the person you are discipling to learn to lead. In what ministries could they be involved? How can you help them gain confidence and competence to become a spiritual leader?
4. Help them find someone whom they can mentor.

# MAY 26

## *2 Kings 4:1-44*



**W**HEN WE ARE FACED WITH THE IMPOSSIBLE,  
WE WRESTLE WITH FAITH VS. ACTION.

Do we trust God or do we act in order to fix the problem? Notice the situations mentioned in 2 Kings 4.

First, we are told of the financial crisis of the Shunammite woman. Second, we learn of the tragedy of her son's death. Third, we read about the prophets of God and the poison stew and the donated barley bread. In all three cases, a great need existed, one that was far beyond their ability to fix alone. We read of similar situations handled by our Lord: the lack of finances to pay taxes, the raising of the daughter of Jairus, and the feeding of the 5000. The principles taught in all of these passages are the same.

**1. Faith does not mean that we do not act upon what we know.** In every case, there was the crisis or failings of people, but God did not give up on people being involved in solving the crisis. The woman provided the vessels for the oil. The prophet prayed over the dead boy. The prophet put meal in the stew and received 20 loaves of barley bread. Faith teaches us to act, not to sit still. There is a huge difference between acting on your own because you do not trust God and acting because you trust God.

**2. Faith means that we ultimately trust God for the results.** We recognize that there are things that only God can do. We do not try to get ahead of God, but we certainly must not doubt him either. Faith means that I surrender my all to God: my vessels, my prayers, my food, and my supply.

What are you facing today to demands that you trust God? How can you surrender totally to God in a way that demonstrates that you are faithfully serving, trusting, and praying?



# MAY 27

*2 Kings 5:1-27*



**W**E CALL IT EGO, ARROGANCE, OR SELF-SUFFICIENCY, BUT IT ALL COMES DOWN TO ONE WORD: PRIDE.

When Eve sinned in the garden, it was a sin that found its root in pride. The same holds true with Cain and with people of Noah's day. It leads to sin, and causes us to refuse to repent or to seek help.

"Pride is your greatest enemy, humility is your greatest friend" (John R. W. Stott).

"It was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind" (C. S. Lewis).

"The first and worst cause of errors that abound in our day and age is spiritual pride. This is the main door by which the devil comes into the hearts of those who are zealous for the advancement of Christ" (Jonathan Edwards).

Pride nearly cost Naaman his life. Diagnosed with leprosy, he proceeded to Israel to demand of King Jehoram a cure from God. Jehoram was not a man of faith. Elisha the prophet heard of the plight and sent for Naaman. Finally, Naaman surrendered his pride, did what the prophet told him to do, and he lived. If he would have stayed in his pride, Naaman would have died. Pride is like that.

We can get so blinded by pride that we destroy relationships, lose jobs, hurt feelings, and ruin our testimonies. Pride, at its root, is a spiritual problem. It causes us to refuse to obey God.

Do you have a pride problem? With whom do you need to be reconciled? From whom do you need to seek forgiveness? How do you need to say that you are sorry? What attitude or behavior do you need to change?

# MAY 28

*2 Kings 6:1-33*



**A** PASTOR WAS DRIVING ALONG, ON HIS WAY TO PREACH AT A LITTLE COUNTRY CHURCH, WHEN HE FELT A SUDDEN VIBRATION. A TIRE HAD GONE FLAT.

As the 78-year-old servant of God maneuvered his car to a stop, a trucker pulled up behind him. A young man jumped out, assessed the situation, and cheerfully changed the tire. The pastor got to the service in plenty of time, and it was not until later that he realized his car did not even have a jack!

It was a minor problem. He was a retired, faithful minister. It was a tiny congregation. We might think God would be too busy with larger and more important needs than to be concerned about a flat tire, but his promise to provide for the needs of his people covers little things as well as big ones.

2 Kings 6 captures two important stories for us. One has to do with a borrowed axe head and the other with the need to see God at work. How often do we get overwhelmed with the things of life: we fret over elections, we worry about tomorrows, and we get frazzled with the unexpected. When you read, however, about God's care by miraculously making an iron axe head float or by opening a servant's eyes so that he could see God's spiritual protection, we more fully understand that God cares about the small things. He even cares about the things that some people would call insignificant.

Do not miss that fact that God cares about what you face, what you fear, and what you cannot see or understand? Do not see yourself unimportant in the grand scheme of life. Ask God to open your eyes to who he is and what he is doing.

# MAY 29

*2 Kings 8:1-24; 2 Chronicles 21:1-20*



**H**AVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED THE THINGS THAT MAKE US CRY?

We cry at movies when the hero dies or the dog leaves. We cry at ballgames when our team loses. We cry at weddings and funerals. We cry when we are happy, and we cry when we are sad. Sometimes we cry over the significant, but many times we cry over the trivial.

These passages record a terrible moment in the prophet Elisha's ministry. Ben-Hadad, who was king when Naaman was Captain of the Syrian army, still reigns but is deathly ill. He sends his assistant, Hazael, to find Elisha and ask him if God will allow him to recover from his illness. It is interesting how this pagan king, having known of and seen the faith of Elisha, entreats him for an answer rather than his own soothsayers. It speaks to the fact that, while the world may mock us, trusting and believing God is still a mighty witness. Elisha tells Hazael that Ben-Hadad will recover but won't. The message is confusing, but Elisha knew Hazael's character. Character matters in all things, and Hazael had deep character flaws. He would murder Ben-Hadad and usurp the Syrian throne.

2 Kings 8:11 mentions the weeping of Elisha. Once Elisha had revealed God's pronouncement over Ben-Hadad, he weeps because he knows what Hazael will do to Israel. Murder and all kinds of heinous acts will reign under Hazael's leadership, and so Elisha weeps.

Character matters in those who lead. Throughout the history of our nation, we have seen good leaders and we have seen evil ones. As human beings, leaders make poor choices. Sometimes they make evil choices. As a Christian, when was the last time you wept for your nation? Perhaps revival moves through the prayers of God's people and ignites through the tears of God's people.

# MAY 30

*2 Kings 10:18-31*



**I**T IS POSSIBLE TO HAVE THE RIGHT THEOLOGY, OR IDEA, BUT PRESENT IT IN THE WRONG WAY OR THROUGH THE WRONG ATTITUDE.

A godly deacon once told his young pastor fresh out of seminary, “In the decisions you make, understand that you can be absolutely right and absolutely wrong at the same time.” There are times that we may be right in what we believe, but we treat people with disrespect or demonstrate an arrogance in what we believe or do.

When Jehu became king, he was determined to rid his nation of Baal worship. Under this idolatry, people were involved in all kinds of negligent sin, including moral degradation and human sacrifice. God was faithful in his promise to Jehu. Because Jehu had successfully rooted out pagan worship from the nation, God told him that his descendants would occupy Israel’s throne for four generations (30).

At the same time, though, God was not fully pleased with Jehu. First, the king did not completely obey the Lord. He still permitted the idolatrous worship of the golden calves in Bethel and Dan (29). Second, the Lord was displeased with Jehu’s inexcusable cruelty and treachery (1-17). Years later, God declared through the prophet Hosea that his would “avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu” and bring an end to the northern kingdom of Israel (Hosea 1:4).

F. B. Meyer wrote, “We may give good advice to our friends, but fall into the very faults against which we warn them. We may pose as infallible guides, but fall into the crevasses and precipices from which we had carefully warned our companions. Jehu avenged the idolatries of Ahab, but he departed not from Jeroboam’s calves.” Let’s make sure that we stand for and believe the right things, and that we do them with the right reasons and the right attitudes.

# MAY 31

*2 Kings 11:1-21; 2 Chronicles 22-23*



**W**HEN GOD'S PLANS SEEM TO GO AWRY, OUR FAITH IS CHALLENGED AND WE END UP QUESTIONING GOD.

Sometimes when we submit to God's plans, we want those plans to be fulfilled immediately and within the timeframe or processes that work best for us. We must remember that God always keeps his promises. Today's reading is a classic example.

In this unique narrative, Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, usurps the royal throne after the death of her son, Ahaziah. She imitates the decisiveness and cruelty of her mother. With great precision, she begins to murder all of her relatives who might ascend to the throne. For the moment, the promise that God made to David seems to have been thwarted. There would be no Davidic King in Israel and the Messiah would not be his descendent.

God, however, had other plans. One of Athaliah's grandsons, Joash, was quietly taken by his nurse and hidden from his grandmother. She thinks she has all heirs to the throne killed and assumes power. For six years she rules, never discovering that one of her grandsons, Joash, has escaped the cold-blooded coup. God's promise of an eternal kingdom for David is kept alive. We think that God came through just barely, but God, on the other hand, was not surprised.

Whatever promises God has made to us, he will keep. Everett Storms has calculated that there are 8810 promises in the Bible - 7487 were promises God made to human beings. Some were specific to a particular people or person, but most are promises made to all of us. Every promise intended to be fulfilled by today has been fulfilled. Some are left to still be fulfilled, such as Christ's second coming. God keeps his promises; he always has, and he always will.

# JUNE 1

*2 Kings 12:1-16; 2 Chronicles 24:1-16*



**W**E UNDERSTAND THAT THE CHURCH IS NOT A BUILDING.

In the New Testament, it is clearly taught that the church is the gathering of the people of God to worship. We can worship in a building, by a tree, or in a basement. In the Old Testament, the people of God were very much connected to the place dedicated for worship and sacrifice. In the wilderness, it was the tabernacle. In Jerusalem, it was the Temple. For the people of the Old Testament, much of their religious observance was connected with physical things such as buildings, furniture, rituals, and festivals. That's why it was critical for Joash to rebuild the Temple.

Joash was a good king, but he made a critical mistake. He took some of the holy articles that had been donated and gave them to Hazael, the King of Aram, as a tribute. In other words, he gave to the world what belonged to God. There are 2 important takeaways from these verses.

First, do not neglect God's house. While the church is not a building, God's people still need to gather as the church. We may be able to worship under a tree or in a tree stand, but we cannot do it alone. Corporate worship in God's house is critical for us. One of the biggest downfalls of the people of God is not just moral failure; it is spiritual complacency. Our spiritual lives fall into disrepair because we slowly begin to neglect the duties and obligations we have toward discipleship and mission.

Second, do not give to the world what belongs to God. Whether it is time, abilities, gifting, or money, give to God what he rightfully deserves. We "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's" but let's also remember to "render unto God what is God's." Do not confuse the two.

# JUNE 2

## *2 Kings 13*



### **C**HILDREN WANT TO WALK IN THEIR FATHERS' FOOTSTEPS.

Second Kings 13 provides two tragic stories.

One is tracing the Kings of Israel and the reminder of their constant failure. Jehoahaz (814–798 B.C.) succeeded his father, Jehu, but led Israel to worship the Asherah pole, a representation of the Canaanite fertility goddess. The Lord used the Arameans to reduce Israel's army (1–9). Jehoahaz's son Jehoash ruled for sixteen years (798–782 B.C.) and was remembered for his oppression of King Amaziah of Judah (10–13). They were literally following in their fathers' footsteps instead of following the Lord.

The second is the death of Elisha and the lack of faith shown by Jehoash (sometimes called Joash but not the same Joash who ruled in Judah). The death of Elisha illustrates the decline of the nation. Jehoash was given a blank check by Elisha for Israel to have victory over her enemies, and yet Jehoash did not respond by faith. He was told to strike the ground with his arrows but only hit the ground three times. God gave Israel those victories, but imagine what would have happened if he would have beat the ground like a drummer in a band. Israel would not have been defeated for another thousand years.

In whose shoes are you walking? We listen to the voices of the world, and we end up making really bad choices and decisions. We become people who lack faith and struggle in trusting God. Those decisions can have an incredibly adverse effect on our churches and in the world. One of the great witnesses we give is when we trust God.

Therefore, make a decision today to not walk in the world's shoes. Follow instead in the footsteps of God.

# JUNE 3

*2 Kings 16:1-20; 2 Chronicles 28:1-27*



**T**HE BIBLE IS FILLED WITH REFERENCES OF HOW WE MUST PROTECT AND LOVE CHILDREN.

One of the times that Jesus became angry (there are at least five times in Scripture that mention the anger of Jesus or more appropriately righteous indignation) was when the disciples tried to keep the children from being brought to Jesus for his blessing (Mark 10:13-16). Jesus loves children. Can you imagine what it would have been like to be one of the children whom Jesus took into his arms and blessed?

One of the marks of a depraved society is seen in how that society treats children. Under Ahaz, children were being offered as sacrifices to the Canaanite god, Molech. Ahaz himself participated in this atrocity (2 Kings 16:3). The statue was located in the Valley of Hinnom. Jesus used this image eleven times in the New Testament as a picture of Hell. The word he used was “gehenna,” a transliteration of the Hebrew word “ge’hinnom.” This statue, along with others built by Ahaz, was torn down by Josiah (2 Kings 23:10).

We must understand the sacredness of life and how precious and vulnerable children are. In America, we have told children that they are a mistake, an aberration of nature. We have told them that they are not the special creation of God but are nothing more than a result of evolution. In our nation, while we do not offer children as sacrifices on an open altar, we have our own atrocity that we call abortion. We kill children in the name of convenience upon the altar of profit. One of the ways that we will change our society is by standing for life rather than death. Pray today for an overturning of the Supreme Court ruling allowing abortion in our country. Let’s love children as Jesus does.



# JUNE 4

*2 Kings 18:1-8; 2 Chronicles 29:1-36*



**W**HEN GOD TAKES SECOND PLACE, WE THEN BEGIN TO BUILD ALTARS OF HABIT THAT ROB OF WHAT GOD WANTS FOR US.

Think about all of the altars we build. While there are many good things in the world, we take these things and build an altar of sacrifice to them. We place them in priority over God and the worship of God. To overcome these habits, we learn two things from Hezekiah:

“He did what was right in the Lord’s sight just as his ancestor David had done. He removed the high places, shattered the sacred pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake that Moses made, for the Israelites burned incense to it up to that time. He called it Nehushtan. Hezekiah trusted in the Lord God of Israel; not one of the kings of Judah was like him, either before him or after him. He remained faithful to Yahweh and did not turn from following him but kept the commands the Lord had commanded Moses” (2 Kings 18:3-6).

First, tear down the altar. If there is something that is keeping you from God and robbing you of what God has for you, tear it down. Break it all together. Do not go around things that tempt you.

Second, build ways that you can learn to trust God. Study and apply God’s Word to your life. First ask, “How best can I be faithful to God in this decision.” Be obedient to him in everything.

The victorious Christian life is not one that is lived on Sunday only. The Christian life should affect every aspect of our lives. Live for Jesus every day. That’s the secret to tearing down the altars of habit in our lives.

# JUNE 5

*2 Kings 18:17-37; 2 Chronicles 32:9-19*



**M**OST, IF NOT ALL OF US, ARE SPIRITUAL GIANTS  
ON SUNDAY.

When we are surrounded by other Christians, our minds are filled with God's Word, we have sung songs of worship to Christ, and we know the spiritual language, being a Christian is easy. It is when we have to step out into the world, go home to our families, or sit at our desk at school that the Christian life gets difficult. At that point, many of us compromise. We are Christians when it is convenient; we shrink in our trust when our faith is challenged.

It was no small thing for Hezekiah to rebel against the proud King of Assyria. The king had attacked Hamath and Arpad, Samaria and Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivah, and reduced all of them to heaps of stones. These cities were sufficient proofs of the might of his ruthless soldiers. How could the King of Judah and the people of Jerusalem hope to withstand? Rabshakeh could not comprehend the secret source of Hezekiah's confidence. He was certain that Hezekiah could not turn to Egypt for help. Pharaoh had been successfully neutralized; he was nothing more than a bruised reed. What about the Lord God of Israel? What would be the possibility that he could do for Israel more than the gods of the other nations had done for them?

The world does not understand the source of our strength and our hope. We believe in a God that they cannot see, and trust in a future that they cannot comprehend. While we understand that God proves his existence to us, we live by faith (Romans 1:17-20). While the world crumbles, we have a peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:8). Keep trusting God even when people say that it is foolish to do so. The world oftentimes challenges our faith because they want to know if we have something worth believing in.

# JUNE 6

*2 Kings 20:1-11; 2 Chronicles 32:24-20*



**T**HE URGENT REQUEST OF A RIGHTEOUS PERSON IS VERY POWERFUL IN ITS EFFECT” (JAMES 5:16).

The illustration that James uses is Elijah. He prayed and it did not rain for 3 1/2 years. He prayed a second time and the rain came. When people of faith pray, God listens.

The prayer of Hezekiah was an interesting one. God was gracious in letting him know that his life was coming to an end. Then Hezekiah prayed and God responded to his prayer. He promised Hezekiah that he would add fifteen years to his life. Hezekiah was granted an added fifteen years, since he died around 686 B.C. His prayer was not a selfish one. He knew his death would give Sennacherib a reason to boast against God and that his son Manasseh was too young to serve effectively as king. God was so clear as to his promise, he even gave Hezekiah a sign. He made the shadow of the sundial go backwards ten degrees rather than forwards.

We understand that God knows all things and that he is not subject to anything that human beings do. He is God and always has been. Yet God makes it known that our prayers matter. So there are a couple of takeaways from this passage for us.

First, make prayer a priority - righteous prayer - from a pure heart and mind. Find the mind of God and prayer God's mind and heart.

Second, get your house and keep your house in order. Don't get so caught up in chasing the things of the world or in the challenges of the world that you forget about the fact that life is fragile. We only have so much time on this earth to make an impact, and then the sundial reaches its end. Make the most of life and with those whose lives you can engage. Time is ticking.

# JUNE 7

*2 Kings 22:1-22; 2 Chronicles 34:1-28*



**W**E CAN THINK THAT WE ARE WHERE WE SHOULD BE SPIRITUALLY, ONLY TO FIND OUT THAT WE REALLY ARE NOT THERE.

We often pray for revival or for God to move, but our prayers are more concentrated on others than ourselves. The fact is, though, if revival is going to happen, it has to start with us.

In 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, Josiah is king. During Josiah's reign, power in the ancient Near East passed from Assyria to Babylon. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was destroyed by the Babylonians in 612 B.C. and the whole Assyrian empire fell in 609 B.C. Josiah was the last good king of the Davidic line prior to the Babylonian exile. Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:2), possibly Habakkuk, and Zephaniah (Zephaniah 1:1) were prophets to Judah during the reign of Josiah.

At this time, Josiah was around 26 years old. The first thing he did as king was to repair the Temple. Worship and sacrifice had to become a priority again for Israel. During its repair, Hilkiah the priest found a copy of the Scriptures. Many believe it was most probably a copy of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. Some scholars believe that Shaphan must have read Deuteronomy 28–30, in which is recorded a renewal of the national covenant and a listing of the terrible threats and curses against all who violate the law of God.

Note closely the response of Josiah. He tore his clothes, a sign of deep repentance and grief. When we understand what God demands and how our lives do not measure up, it should cause us to grieve. We are not where we think that we are. Never forget the importance that God's Word and his church have on our lives and our nation.

# JUNE 8

*2 Kings 24:1-20; 2 Chronicles 36:4-21*



**B**OTH 2 KINGS AND 2 CHRONICLES END WITH THE TERRIBLE STORY OF THE FINAL DOWNFALL OF THE KINGS OF JUDAH, THEIR REFUSAL TO TRUST GOD, AND GOD'S JUDGMENT UPON THE NATION.

There are consequences for sin. That fact is a difficult concept for Christians and an especially difficult concept for non-Christians. We don't want to believe that God brings judgment, and we certainly don't want to believe that God judges us, our sin, or our rebellion.

Israel had traveled too far away from God. One would think that they would have repented and returned to God, especially having watched the Northern Kingdom be destroyed by the Assyrians. Babylon stands at the door. Israel did not think that God would judge them because they were his people, but he did.

One of the consequences of America claiming to be a Christian nation is that we have grown cold toward God. We are the people of God; therefore, God will not judge us. If you examine where we are spiritually, morally, and ethically, we are not where we think we are. There are those who call themselves Christians, who have taken the things of abomination, and declared God's favor of them. We have tried to destroy God's Word and replace it with human reason.

The church must make her choice between one of two courses: either keep from all entangling alliances, and from vying for temporal power, or she must face the liability of being brought under the power of God's judgment. While we may not be physically in captivity, God's presence is far from us. If we repent, and put away our sins, and turn again to the Lord, he will not only have mercy, but abundantly pardon, and bring us back to himself again. Pray that West Virginia and America will return to God.

# JUNE 9

## *Ezra 1*



**G**OD'S PEOPLE HAD BEEN IN CAPTIVITY FOR 70 YEARS IN BABYLON. IT HAD BEEN A SAD TIME FOR THEM (PSALM 137).

Yet, true to the prophecy of Jeremiah which had been proclaimed nearly 90 years earlier, God used an unbeliever, Cyrus, King of Persia, to deliver his people from captivity, and to decree that the house of God, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's armies, should be rebuilt in Jerusalem.

One would imagine that the exiled Jews in Babylon had been praying for God to raise up a deliverer from among his people, much like Moses of old, or Gideon, or another deliverer from the period of the Judges. God was going to hold true to his promise, but who among them would have thought God would use the "deliverer" he chose? A pagan King named Cyrus.

It really shouldn't have come as a great surprise to them. After all, nearly 200 years earlier, long before they had even gone into captivity, God had revealed his plan, and had even called the deliverer by his name!

The prophet Isaiah had written: "...who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built, and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid'" (Isaiah 44:28).

Don't ever think your situation is hopeless, no matter how dark the circumstances may seem. Just remember, God is in control, and he will fulfill his plan! Trust him.

# JUNE 10

## *Ezra 2*



**A**S YOU READ THE SECOND CHAPTER OF EZRA, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT YOUR EYES BEGIN TO GLAZE OVER.

It's one of those chapters that lists a bunch of names. In the case of the returning exiles from Babylon, these were difficult names. The total of the numbers listed here in Ezra chapter two are 29,818. Ezra and Nehemiah both list the total number of people who returned to Judah and Jerusalem, proper, as 42,360. Now that is a gang of people.

Ezra lists them in this section in eight different groups, naming only the heads of clans and families, or leaders of particular groups. If all the remnant who returned was listed, imagine how hard it would be to plow through all those names during your daily Bible reading. Sometimes the casual Bible reader will skip past sections of scripture like this, or other sections that contain rather lengthy genealogies. However, there is often a great lesson to be learned – even in these lists of difficult names (such as the four unlikely women who are listed in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1).

The thought that came to my mind, while reading this chapter, was how important it was to the Jewish people to have that list of names. It surely was a comfort to them for generations to look back at these names and remember God's faithfulness to his promise, and the faithful people mentioned here.

Hebrews 11 is a familiar chapter, recording many "heroes of the faith." Some are named. Some are not named, but can be identified by the description. Others go unknown but to God. Aren't you glad that God has a permanent record of his people?

Remember, dear friend, Jesus said, "Rejoice because your name is written down in Heaven." God has a record of his people!

# JUNE 11

6:1-12



**O**FTEN WE, AS CHRISTIANS, BEMOAN THE UNGODLINESS OF OUR LEADERS. JOHN CALVIN ONCE SAID, “WHEN GOD JUDGES A NATION HE GIVES THEM WICKED RULERS.”

Darius I, (also called Darius the Great) was one of the most powerful Persian kings. He reigned from 521-485 B.C. The threat Darius makes in his decree in verse 11 would not be an idle threat. The ancient historian, Herodotus, reported that Darius impaled 3,000 Babylonians when he conquered that city. This guy is far from what we would consider as a godly ruler.

Yet, in this passage we see that Darius continued Cyrus the Great’s policy of restoring the Jewish people to their homeland. allowing them to rebuild the temple of their God (a god that he did not worship). Darius allowed construction to begin in spite of the enemies of the Jews who sought to stop it. Notice the strength of Darius’ warning to those enemies.

Neither Darius, nor Cyrus were worshipers of Yahweh, yet years earlier, Isaiah records God calling Cyrus, “his servant!” The truth of the matter is this is not the first time God used a pagan ruler to bring about his perfect plan. Consider Solomon’s words as found in Proverbs 21:1, “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.”

Let us repent of our own sins, and pray for our own rulers, not forgetting the fact that God holds the hearts of our President, Governors, Supreme Court Justices, and members of Congress in his mighty hand.



# JUNE 12

*Ezra 6:19-22*



**F**IFTEEN YEARS EARLIER, A GRATEFUL REMNANT OF EXILES HAD RETURNED TO JERUSALEM, AFTER 70 YEARS OF CAPTIVITY IN BABYLON.

The first order of business was to rebuild the Temple. The foundation was laid, causing great joy among the returned exiles. Tears flowed, and the shouts of joy could be heard a great distance.

The enemies of God's people petitioned Artaxerxes, King of Persia, and by force of power he caused the work to stop immediately.

However after a decade and a half, God raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, whose powerful preaching caused the people to rise up and begin anew to construct the Temple of God in Jerusalem. History tells us the work began three weeks after Haggai began his preaching, on September 20, 520 B.C.

God's people then kept the ancient feast of the Passover, instituted to observe their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. They were considered "God's People" because of the covenant made between God and their father, Abraham. It is important to also notice that it was not only the Jews who kept the Passover at this point, but also proselytes who had "separated themselves from the uncleanness of the people of the land, to worship the Lord." These are simply folks who had come to God by faith and not by being physical children of Abraham.

Isn't it a blessing to know that being the "people of God" is not due to racial connections, but by faith, meeting with him on his terms?

# JUNE 13

## *Ezra 9*



**T**HROUGH EZRA'S GODLY EXAMPLE, HE IS ABLE TO LEAD HIS PEOPLE TO REPENTANCE FOR THEIR NATIONAL SIN, AND RETURN IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S COMMANDMENTS.

Ezra acknowledges Judah's idolatry that had resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the people being carried away into Babylonian captivity. It is telling that he understands it is only by God's grace that they had been allowed to leave the exile and return to Jerusalem (8).

Ezra realizes that while God's people were celebrating the completion of the Temple, they were growing dangerously close to falling under God's judgment again. They had forsaken his earlier commandments against intermarrying with the pagans who were natives of the land. Ezra's heart is broken, and he begins to repent of the sins of the people. Even though Ezra, himself, was personally guiltless in this matter, he still identifies with his people and their proclivity to unfaithfulness to their God. Like several other heroes of the faith, Ezra owns the sin of his people and their fathers. He exhibits brokenness before God with a true heart of repentance.

As Christ followers in America today, many of us recognize the terrible lostness around us. We recoil at the evil in our culture, and boldly cry out against it from our pulpits, but in many cases, through laxness in our own lives, we have not been the salt and light we should. Perhaps, like Ezra of old, we need to own the sin ourselves and with broken repentant hearts repent to our holy God, and who knows, we might even lead our nation back to God.

# JUNE 14

## *Nehemiah 1*



**H**AVE YOU LOOKED AROUND US LATELY? I MEAN, HAVE YOU REALLY LOOKED AROUND? OUR WORLD IS TERRIBLY BROKEN.

Social injustice, hunger, poverty, famine, disease epidemics, wars and unrest are only a few of the plagues that circle this globe. Substance abuse, sexual perversion, various addictions, violent crime and political corruption abound, not just in the great metropolitan areas, but even in Small Town, USA.

Even deeper than that, we must understand that so many of these issues are simply symptoms of the true problems we face in our culture today. The problem is sin. Sin's curse on this world has taken a terrible toll. Even here in the Bible Belt, we are not immune to the ravages that sin has brought upon our society.

People are enslaved. Many are groping in darkness. Lostness is everywhere. May God open our eyes as he did Nehemiah, when the king's cupbearer heard the sad condition of his homeland and the pitiful remnant that lived there in Jerusalem. The walls were broken down. The gates had been destroyed, and the people were easy prey for the enemies that surrounded them. They were unable to help their sad condition.

God began to burden the heart of Nehemiah. Miles away in the Persian palace at Susa, his heart became broken for his people to the point that he knew of nothing else he could do but pray, and fast, and seek a movement of God's hand.

May we also be burdened for the lost today. May we seek God's face, and be open to his call for us.

# JUNE 15

*Nehemiah 2:1-16*



**N**EHEMIAH WAS WALKING ON TREACHEROUS GROUND.

The Jewish exile was working in the court of the Persian King Artaxerxes I. As the cupbearer to the king, he had personal contact daily. The news of the condition of the remnant back in Jerusalem and the deplorable condition of the holy city had broken Nehemiah's heart. Moreover, God had burdened him to do something about it, but he had no idea what he could do.

For days he had mourned, and fasted, and prayed. He had been praying about the situation for about four months, and it was showing on his face as he went about his duties in serving the king. Artaxerxes demanded to know why he was sad in his presence, knowing that he was not sick. Nehemiah was right to be frightened. Being sad in the presence of the king was a serious offense, but he poured his heart out to the king and Artaxerxes asked him, "What are you requesting?"

Here it gets good! First, note that Nehemiah said, "he prayed to the God of Heaven," and then made his request of the king. What a request it was. We learn in Ezra 4:21 that this same Artaxerxes had ordered Ezra's work in rebuilding the temple to cease. Now Nehemiah was asking the most powerful man in the world to reverse his earlier decision. Dangerous ground, indeed!

After invoking the help that only God could provide, Nehemiah asked the unthinkable, and was granted all he asked for. Don't be afraid to "ask big" when God burdens you for a particular task. Pray for his power to be made manifest, and step out on faith. God specializes in the impossible.

# JUNE 16

*Nehemiah 2:17-20*



**N**EHEMIAH ARRIVED IN JERUSALEM WITH AN ENTOURAGE.

The king sent Nehemiah with officers of the army and horsemen. He was there three days before announcing to anyone in the city the nature of his visit. At night he arose with only a few men with him for the purpose of surveying the extent of the damage to the city walls. What he saw was total devastation. In one area, the rubble was so bad his donkey couldn't traverse the area and he had to proceed on foot.

"You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision" (17-18).

Nehemiah calls the leaders of the people together and told them why he was there. One can only imagine how shocked the people must have been to hear this. Many may have considered it Mission Impossible. Yet, when he told them of God's hand upon him and that he had the blessings of King Artaxerxes to proceed, with the means by which to accomplish it, they immediately were on board.

Why did Nehemiah not march into Jerusalem with trumpets blaring, and with pomp and circumstance announcing the purpose of his coming? Why did he operate under a cover of darkness for three days?

He knew that this was all in God's timing. This was not something he should rush into in his own strength. He knew that opposition was coming, but that God would accomplish this in his time.

Even when you know you're in his will, don't get ahead of God.

# JUNE 17

## *Nehemiah 4*



**T**HE WORK ON THE WALLS HAD BEGUN. OPPOSITION IMMEDIATELY AROSE FROM THE GOVERNOR OF SYRIA, A PERSIAN OFFICIAL, AND A LEADER OF SEVERAL ARABIAN TRIBES.

Their jeering and insults would certainly have enraged the residents of Jerusalem who had committed to the great task. However, Nehemiah understood that anger and rage against their enemies would not get the job done. They may have been stirring up quite a stink, but he wasn't about to let that stop the work.

What did he do? He prayed. We find that when Nehemiah is facing a crises, he is always a man of prayer. I love the simplicity of his prayer:

“Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders” (4-5).

What was the result of Nehemiah's prayer?

“So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work” (6).

Whenever we are working for the Lord, the enemy will never fail to try to stir up something to take our eyes off the task. Don't let the stink stop you!

# JUNE 18

## *Nehemiah 6*



**W**ORK ON REBUILDING THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM WAS PROGRESSING.

The enemies of God's people were concerned. The jeering and ridicule had not stopped the work; now they begin to use another method, compromise.

Nehemiah was invited to come down from the wall and meet with them at a village on the plain of Ono, about 27 miles from Jerusalem. This offer came four times, but Nehemiah knew that there could be no good come of it, and he simply refused to stop the work and come down to talk to the enemy.

Then another of the local opposition leaders sent out an open letter, available to everyone, accusing Nehemiah of trying to fortify Jerusalem for insurrection and to seek to be king, himself. Nehemiah publicly answered that none of his accusations were true, and that they only wanted to frighten the people into being afraid of another war, and stopping the work. Nehemiah simply prayed, "But now, O God, strengthen my hands" (9).

Nehemiah refused to compromise with the enemy, or even to waste the time to meet with them. The result can be found in verses 15-16, "So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God."

Victory!

When Satan knows he can't beat us, he often tries to get us to compromise in God's work. Don't fall for it. Stay on the wall. Don't come down!

# JUNE 19

## *Nehemiah 8*



**W**HAT A DAY OF CELEBRATION! AFTER ONLY 52 DAYS, THE WALLS HAD BEEN COMPLETED AND THE BURNED OUT GATES REPLACED.

The people had worked diligently in the face of mockery, attempted distraction, and even threats of armed attack. It came to the point that those who worked to rebuild the walls had to work with a sword tied to their waists, with watchmen all along the wall to sound an alarm in case of attack.

Jerusalem was once again a fortified city for the first time since Nebuchadnezzar's armies had breached the walls in 586 BC. There was truly a reason to celebrate.

The people all gathered together for an assembly to hear Ezra the Priest read from the Law of God. They stood from morning to mid day just listening intently to the Word of God as it was read and explained to them. The feast of Tabernacles was reinstituted. There was a sense of joy that was palpable in the crowd and Nehemiah proclaimed to the people that this day was holy to the Lord.

There were many things that could have thrilled the Jews that day. The spiritual revival, the safety provided by the reconstructed walls, the security provided by the newly rebuilt gates, the teamwork of the people who came together to get the job done, and the enemies vanquished.

It's easy to rejoice when good things like that are happening, but I especially take note of what Nehemiah reminds them, and us. It is not the fortified walls or standing army which makes a people strong. We are not sufficient in ourselves. We depend upon God, and it is the joy of the Lord that is our strength!



# JUNE 20

## *Esther 1-2*



**E**STHER IS A MOST INTERESTING BOOK. EVEN THOUGH THE NAME OF GOD IS NOT MENTIONED IN THE ENTIRE BOOK, ONE CANNOT READ IT WITHOUT SEEING HIS PROVIDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY THROUGHOUT IT.

There are five main characters in this book. The first three are powerful Persians in the capital city of Shushan, or Susa. The main characters include a king, Ahasuerus (Xerxes) his queen, Vashti, a nobleman named Haman, and two Hebrew exiles who had been carried away to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. These two are identified as Mordecai and his beautiful cousin named Hadassah, or Esther, whom Mordecai had raised as a daughter after her parents had died.

There is a lot of action early on in this book.

Queen Vashti loses favor with King Xerxes and is deposed as the Queen, and a beauty pageant ensues to find a new queen. Mordecai uncovers a plot to kill the king and saves his life. Anti-Semitism flourishes as Haman seeks to kill all the Jews, and Hadassah (Esther) a Jewish girl, is chosen to be the new queen, and God's people are delivered and Haman killed.

It seems that in our world today the rich and powerful seem to get all the breaks. However, down through the ages, and today as well, God has often chosen to use the poor, weak, unprivileged, and insignificant to accomplish his purposes. He does it in the Book of Esther, he does it still today. Never think you are a nobody. If you know God, you're the child of a king! He uses his children.

# JUNE 21

*Esther 3-4:14*



**E**VEN THOUGH GOD'S NAME IS NOT MENTIONED IN THE BOOK OF ESTHER, WE SEE HIS MIGHTY HAND AND PROVIDENCE THROUGHOUT THE NARRATIVE.

The word “providence” is a combination of two Latin words meaning “to see before.” Not only does our sovereign God see the future the same as the past, but he has pre-ordained his adopted children to accomplish his purposes.

The Jewish people in exile were marked for extinction. Much like Adolph Hitler in the mid 20th century, wicked Haman had planned genocide against God's chosen nation. The decree had been passed, and there was despair among the Hebrews who knew their execution date had been set.

But wait a minute! An orphaned captive girl, through totally unlikely circumstances, had been elevated to the position of queen. Esther was the only Jewish captive of the thousands who were marked for death who could do anything about the situation, even though the king did not know her ethnicity at the time. Plus, she had been raised as the daughter of Mordecai, who had once saved the life of the king.

Coincidence? Absolutely not! It was the providence of God, who had seen and planned beforehand to protect his people and to preserve the line of the promised Messiah.

My friend, if you are God's adopted child, you are indeed called and equipped for his purposes. Before you were conceived he knew you and planned your work. You are not a victim *of* circumstance, you are a victor *over* circumstance. Whenever the situation seems bleak, or even impossible, just remember that God has placed you where you are, right now, for his purpose and will “for such a time as this!”

# JUNE 22

*Esther 4:15-17*



**T**HE DECREE HAD BEEN ISSUED BY AHASUERUS (XERXES) THAT ALL OF THE JEWS IN EVERY PROVINCE SHOULD BE KILLED ON A CERTAIN DATE.

We know from Daniel's writing that according to the law of the Medes and Persians, that once the king had issued a decree, no one - including the king himself, could change that decree. The Jews all across Persia were appointed for extermination, and the date had been set.

Mordecai sent messages to Queen Esther begging her to intercede for her people. He had reasoned with Esther over three main points.

1. Esther herself would not be exempt from the king's edict.
2. God would not permit the extinction of his people.
3. God brought Esther to the throne, for such a time as this.

Esther knew that no one, including the queen, could approach the king, unless that person was called by the king to come. To approach the king without invitation would most certainly bring about death. In the verse printed above, Esther finally gives in to the pleading of Mordecai. Knowing the gravity of what she was about to do, she made one request, that all of the Jews in the capital city hold a fast for three days and nights. After that, she would approach the king, knowing fully well she would be breaking the law and risking her own death.

Esther showed great courage in doing what she did. Even though God's name and prayer are not mentioned here, she understood the importance and the power of prayer and fasting. Children of God have recognized this power for centuries. We would be wise to practice it more today, ourselves!

# JUNE 23

## *Esther 8*



**H**AMAN HATED MORDECAI. HE WAS A POWER HUNGRY DESCENDANT OF THE WICKED KING AGAG OF THE AMALEKITES, WHOM THE LORD HAD ORDERED SAUL TO ERADICATE YEARS EARLIER.

Haman gained favor with King Ahasuerus, and had become powerful in his court. When godly Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman, he was incensed. From that point on, Haman began his work to get the king to order all of the Jews in the kingdom to be exterminated, and Haman went so far to build a huge gallows in which he planned to personally hang Mordecai.

Years earlier, unbeknown to Haman, Mordecai had heard of a plot to kill Ahasuerus, and alerted the king to it, thereby saving his life. The king had never done anything to repay Mordecai for his good deed, but the scripture tells us that it had been written down in the Chronicles of the Kings of Persia.

On a sleepless night, after the decree to kill all the Jews had been issued, the king was reading the chronicles and came across the good deed done to him by Mordecai. Realizing that nothing had ever been done to repay this gracious act, the king set about to honor Mordecai. The beauty and irony of it all was that Haman was the one who was charged with carrying out the king's wishes to honor Mordecai.

There is much more to tell, but God eventually totally vindicates Mordecai. Haman is put to death on his own gallows he had built for the purpose of hanging Mordecai. Haman's entire estate was eventually given to Mordecai, and the Jews are spared from extinction.

Never doubt that God will take care of his own!

# JUNE 24

*Job 1-3*



**W**ELCOME TO JOB. PERHAPS “EVERY SINGLE DAY” HASN’T WORKED OUT THE WAY YOU INTENDED. MAYBE IT’S BEEN MORE LIKE “EVERY SINGLE WEEK.”

Perhaps, it has, and you are encouraged by your progress through the Old Testament. Wherever you are and however this journey has been, together, let’s meet Job as if it were our first time. Daily Bible reading will give you a sense of the book’s narrative arc, while each devotion considers one topic (a topic which may or may not be the main point) within that reading.

Enter, Job, a blameless, upright, God-fearing man of great wealth. In chapters 1-3 we see his faith tested; we see a man laid bare before the Almighty. He laments, but according to the text, does not sin. How? Perhaps a short phrase, tucked away at the end of the book’s opening paragraph can lead us to an answer.

“Thus Job did continually” (1:5).

Job lived with an awareness of God’s righteousness, from the rising to the setting Sun. One commentator notes that “thus Job did continually” could be translated “all his days,” carrying with it this idea of a life-long habit. Too many times in my life, I’ve wanted the character derived from life-long habits without committing to lifelong habits. I repeatedly underestimate the significance of how I spend my time.

Today is a good day take what one of my favorite authors, James K.A. Smith, would call a liturgical audit of your life. When you wake up, what do you do? Check Facebook, Instagram? When you get to work, get home, have down time, climb in bed - what do you do?

May we pray, read our Bibles, discipline our bodies ... continually.

# JUNE 25

*Job 4-6*



**I**S NOT YOUR FEAR OF GOD YOUR CONFIDENCE AND THE INTEGRITY OF YOUR WAYS YOUR HOPE" (4:6)?

Actually, no, Eliphaz, Job's hope was in neither his fear of God nor the integrity of his ways. God was his confidence; God was his hope. Like Job, our confidence is not in how much we fear God or how much faith we have. Our hope is not in the integrity of our ways, but in the righteousness of God. Fearing God matters, yes, and walking in integrity certainly keeps us from the insecurity that accompanies hidden sin. Our hope, ultimately though, is in neither.

Rest today. You really don't have to be awesome - Jesus is awesome. You're free to strive imperfectly for a life of godliness. Resist the urge to embark on a self-salvation project. You are not just saved by grace, but you are sustained by grace. Fight for the faith to believe that as sure as Christ is risen, your salvation is secured. Our fear of God can give us a healthy posture before God. Our integrity can testify to the Spirit's work and keep us from a life of sin. But there is one thing neither our fear of God nor our integrity can do.

Save us.

May Christ be your confidence today.

# JUNE 26

*Job 7-9*



**B**ILDAD NOT SO SUBTLY IMPLIES THAT JOB IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THAT HAS BEFALLEN HIM.

His logic seems to go something like this: surely God does not do bad things to righteous people. Thus, surely you have incurred his wrath. The equally unsubtle implication, then, is that either Job or his children have sinned. I hope we wouldn't share advice this bad with another, but I cannot help but wonder if we think this is how God deals with us.

How often do we think difficulty in our lives is a sign of God's judgment? Your ministry isn't growing in ways you think it should. Your marriage is difficult. You get an unexpected diagnosis. You lose your job. I don't know what you're walking through today, but I do know that, like in Job, a good God has the first and last word in every circumstance. He works all things together for his glory and the good of those who love him. We don't specifically know why God ordains all that comes to pass in our lives. We don't even know what will happen in the next hour. We do know that God is good. Therefore, the things God does are good. Difficult circumstances and the suffering that follows are not inherently signs of God's displeasure and judgment.

When we believe in a god of retribution, we deal retributively with others. Many times we believe in a god of retribution because we have fashioned a god in our image - a god who operates like us and can be cajoled by our behavior.

In sorrow and joy, we come to the God of the Bible, the God of grace. In his presence we experience and extend grace.

# JUNE 27

*Job 10-12*



**G**OD HAS BEEN GRACIOUS; GOD HAS BEEN GOOD,  
BUT LIFE HAS BEEN HARD.

I've always been prone to prolonged seasons of feeling a bit down and lethargic. My senior year of high school, and first years of undergrad, I began experiencing some of the first signs of clinical depression. I planted our church when I was 21, and the next few years would prove to be some of the worst of my life. There have been too many moments where I've found myself sitting in a doctor's office echoing Job's sentiment "I loathe my life." If you're there today, you're not alone.

There have been extraordinarily good moments, but right now, I don't want to consider those. Because while Job spent days in silence, when Job was overcome by grief, I really don't think he had the wherewithal to consider what good could come of it. In moments of despair, all feels dark; all feels lost.

I'll leave you with the thoughts of one who suffered deeply and knew God intimately, Charles Haddon Spurgeon:

"I am the subject of depression so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to. But I always get back again by this - I know that I trust Christ. I have no reliance but in him, and if he falls, I shall fall with him. But if he does not, I shall not. Because he lives, I shall live also, and I spring to my legs again and fight with my depressions of spirit and get the victory through it. And so you may do, and so you must, for there is no other way of escaping it."



# JUNE 28

*Job 13-15*



**J**OB HAS TAKEN HIS SHARE OF BAD ADVICE AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO FOR MUCH OF THE BOOK.

Some things have been said that are flat out wrong, other things may have been true in principle, but grossly misapplied contextually. Like Job's friends, we can certainly say the wrong thing at times. Just as damagingly, we can say the right thing in the wrong way.

I don't really know if the world has gotten markedly worse with the emergence of the information age and the great technological advances of our time. I do know that we have an opportunity to give our opinion on almost anything and everything. Social media provides us with astounding connectivity, but it also creates a world of publishers devoid of editors.

If Job were written today, perhaps an interesting medium for much of the discourse would be the comment thread on a Facebook status. We must be extremely wary of the advice we give others. Is it biblical? Is it God-honoring? Is it aimed at redemption? If the answer to any of these questions is no, silence should win the day.

Other times we may have the right thing to say, but need to be very cautious how we say it. The world really does not need to know my opinion. On social media, and in conversation, may we be committed to helpful discourse for the common good.

# JUNE 29

*Job 16-18*



**I**'M CONVINCED THE BEST PEOPLE TO BE AROUND ARE ENCOURAGING PEOPLE.

"I could strengthen you" (16:5).

I would rather be around an encouraging person I disagree with than a discouraging person I do agree with any day. While Job's friends are breaking him down, he likely longs for the type of friend who would build him up.

Am I that type of friend to the people in my life?

It is easier to want friends who build us up than to be a friend who builds others up. But paradoxically, God meets our needs when we aren't consumed with meeting them ourselves. Perhaps by pouring into friendships, you'll get more out of friendships. It's a good idea to be silent sometimes, but it's also a good idea to be an encourager in a sea of critics.

We have to decide if we will be negative people, consumed with criticism and pontification, or if we will be positive people, consumed with Christ and encouraging the people in our lives.

Encourage someone today. Like, right now.

# JUNE 30

*Job 19-21*



**F**OR I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVES, AND AT THE LAST HE WILL STAND UPON THE EARTH” (19:25).

Reading the book of Job reminds me there’s a lot I don’t know about why things happen the way they do. I don’t even know what will happen in the next hour, let alone why it is happening. We could all be a phone call away from a Job-like moment of utter loss.

At times uncertainty seems like the only certainty in our lives. Perhaps that’s okay. Perhaps we don’t need all the answers. But there are some things we can know for certain.

Here’s good news for your day: we know for certain that King Jesus lives and reigns. Despite how things may seem, his kingdom will advance and he will return to stand upon the earth. This is certain; this is ultimate reality. Walk in it.

# JULY 1

*Job 22-24*



**T**HERE ARE SEASONS WHEN WE JUST DON'T SEE GOD. WE DON'T SENSE HIS NEARNESS, AND THE EXPERIENCE OF HIS LOVE ISN'T AS PALPABLE AS IT ONCE WAS.

"I do not behold him" (23:9).

Religious platitudes fail to scratch our itching hearts. Well, the Word of God does what religious platitudes cannot. Be comforted by the words of Peter, the Apostle.

"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9).

You haven't seen God, but you love him.

You don't see God, but you believe in him.

If you feel distant from God today, let your faith lead your feelings. When our feelings lead our faith, we are fickle. When our faith leads our feelings, we are faithful.

# JULY 2

*Job 25-27*



## **H**OW THEN CAN MAN BE IN THE RIGHT BEFORE GOD" (25:4)?

Jesus, the world would see, is ultimately God's answer to that question. At the cross, God is simultaneously just and gracious. This is really good news.

We live in a world that longs for justice. The manifestation of such longing can be seen across political ideologies. We also live in a world that longs for grace. We value second chances; we want to know that our last mistake doesn't have to define us.

What if your neighbors heard clearly of a God who is, himself, just? What if your neighbors heard clearly of a God (the same one!) who is, himself, grace?

The gospel is offensive: it requires we acknowledge our utter inability to please God on our own. But the sting of offense lingers not as the salve of the gospel brings news of punished sin and hope for pardoned sinners.

Share the good news of a just, gracious God with someone today. Perhaps the news will not be rejected as quickly as you fear. It's the salve they so desperately need.

# JULY 3

*Job 28-30*



**T**HE TRIUNE GOD OF SCRIPTURE IS THE SOURCE AND FOUNT OF WISDOM. WISDOM, THEN, COMES FROM GOD. WE GLEAN WISDOM, THEN, AS WE BASK IN HIS PRESENCE.

As you read the word today, revel in the heavenly voice - the God of all galaxies speaks the English language. He meets you where you are.

“From where, then, does wisdom come” (28:20)?

Wisdom concerns itself not solely with knowledge, but with the stewardship of knowledge. Wisdom is nuanced, contextual, specific. Do you spend enough time with God to grow in wisdom, understanding how to navigate the many pitfalls and roadblocks that lie before you? Or, do you spend the bulk of your time on Facebook or Twitter? We can glean much from godly friends, and basking in God’s presence is certainly not a lonely venture, but be wary of the chatter; be wary of the crowds. Hundreds of voices vie for your attention. Hundreds of gods vie for your allegiance. Wisdom recognizes the voice of the Good Shepherd; wisdom follows the way everlasting.

Continue in the spiritual disciplines; continue gathering with the beloved church. May you grow in wisdom evermore.

# JULY 4

*Job 31-33*



**M**Y FIRST MENTOR ONCE TOLD ME THE BEST THING THAT COULD HAPPEN TO A CHRISTIAN WOULD BE FOR HIS SIN TO BE PLASTERED ON A BILLBOARD FOR ALL TO SEE.

I'm not entirely sure of all the theological ramifications this statement brings, but I wholeheartedly embrace its sentiment. Hidden sin is deadly sin.

If Job had sinned in some way as to bring this wrath upon himself, he would take it upon his head as a crown. In his brokenness he would not hide his sin, but rather clearly identify the reason for such calamity.

Brokenness in the world generally, and our lives specifically, is a result of sin - our sin. Many in the world revel in their sin. They love it; they broadcast it. As disheartening as this may rightfully be, it brings with it a degree of authenticity from which repentance is not a far step. Sadly, masses of Christians may love their sin just as much, but we've become quite adept at hiding it. An undetected cancer is an untreated cancer, and an untreated cancer is a lethal cancer. Sin that is hidden from light dodges the cure.

Trust the Good Physician today. Meet up with a brother or sister in the faith and confess your sin. Let healing begin.

# JULY 5

*Job 34-36*



**O**UR ARROGANCE REARS ITS UGLY HEAD WHEN WE'RE QUICK TO SPEAK AND SLOW TO LISTEN.

"...one who is perfect in knowledge is with you" (36:4).

Elihu, you're not supposed to say that. You're just supposed to think it internally. Few of us would be so brazen to straight up claim perfect knowledge, but many times we live with implicit claims to perfect knowledge. Puffed up internet theologians and "defenders of the truth" wage cyber war on brothers and sisters because, supposedly, perfect knowledge is with them.

Elihu's arrogance is both unattractive and blatantly sinful. I doubt Elihu realized he had been overtaken by pride. It's more likely that he, as a result of his pride, genuinely thought he knew best and offered his supposedly wise counsel. I need to embrace the reality that I don't know it all. Theologically, relationally, philosophically - I just don't have all the answers. Sometimes I'm right; sometimes I'm wrong; sometimes I'm somewhere in between. Either way, my posture should be one of humility.

Am I quick to speak, or quick to listen? Does my posture reveal a heart of humility or a heart of arrogance?



# JULY 6

*Job 37-39*



**W**HERE WERE YOU WHEN I LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH" (38:4)?

This question refuses to stay on the page. I can almost see the look on Job's face upon hearing this gracious, mic-drop of a rhetorical question. Mourning, questioning, postulating all stop as the Sovereign reminds Job of his creaturely status. Job, at least spiritually speaking, is brought to his knees.

There's a scene in the Avengers where Loki (super villain) comes to Earth and stands amidst a crowd of people. The people bow before him as he proclaims that such is their natural and right posture. A cantankerous old gentleman proves to be his foil when he stands up and says, "But not to men like you."

Truthfully, we were made to bow. Freedom is only found in submission to Christ. God is the creator; we are the creature. Like Job and the rest of humanity, I was nowhere when God laid the foundation of the earth.

Today, rest in your status as a creature, created, loved, pursued, and redeemed by your Creator. Freedom, joy, and life are found only in submission to the one who laid the foundation of the earth. May these words from Job 34 graciously humble you, wherever you are, with whatever questions you have brought to God.

# JULY 7

*Job 40-41*



**I**N A WORLD THAT VALUES SELF-ESTEEM AND ENCOURAGES YOU TO BE YOUR OWN SUPERHERO, REMEMBER THIS: YOU ARE SMALL.

I once heard Louie Giglio give his famous gospel presentation where he talks about the scope of the universe and the glory of God. At the time of the recording I think he said the furthest object we had observed was something like 12 billion lightyears away. One lightyear is nearly 6 trillion miles. So, imagine taking a 1-trillion mile yardstick and flipping it over a billion times. The universe is at least that big. Probably way bigger. One thing from this particular presentation has always stuck with me. At the end he says something like: “I don’t say all this to make you feel small; I say it so you will know that you are very small.”

In response to God’s words, Job understands one thing abundantly clearly: he is small. The gospel ceases to be scandalous when I cease to be small. When I forget that the nations are like grasshoppers before him (Isaiah 40:22), I can begin to think that Jesus should have died for me - that I somehow deserve it.

I’m small. Smaller than a grasshopper in the grand scheme of things. Yet Jesus died in my place.

I’m small. He’s big. That’s really good news.

# JULY 8

## *Job 42*



**J**OB'S PAIN, HEARTACHE, AND SUFFERING WERE REAL, BUT THEY WERE WORTH IT.

At the end of the narrative, Job is restored to an even greater place of abundance and prosperity than he held at the beginning of the book.

“And the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before” (42:10).

Job reminds us that the Lord has both the first and last word in our suffering. The Lord has no equal. Not a moment of Job's suffering could transpire without the Father's consent. The Lord is faithful. He had Job's ultimate good in mind the whole time. In his time, the faithful will prosper. We look to the final resurrection of all things - when king Jesus reigns in full and the faithful reap their final reward.

I'm not sure what you're walking through, perhaps it's a season of relative peace, perhaps it's a season of great struggle. In your struggle understand that, though your suffering brings pain, your pain is not meaningless. God is doing something with it. He orchestrates both the lowest and highest notes to produce a symphony of grace in our lives. The valleys in our lives are more fruitful than we know, and the result of God's grace will be far more wondrous than we dared dream.

Look with me to a bright future - a world where all things sad have become untrue. Because of Christ's triumphant resurrection, we can confidently say that no matter the struggle, no matter the strife, no matter how hard our journey through life, Jesus stands ready and will walk with his bride.

# JULY 9

## *Psalm 5*



**M**Y MIND IS LESS DISTRACTED WHEN I PRAY  
USING MY VOICE.

I play the piano fairly well. I can even sing a song and play the piano at the same time, but I can't talk and play the piano at the same time. It's like there are two people inside me trying to speak at the same time and they're fighting for who goes first!

Talking to God, praying, is not like that. My mind is not divided like trying to play and speak at the same time. However, that doesn't mean I don't become distracted. I start thinking about the next thing I have to do. I might think about the projects coming up when I go to work or chores I need to complete around the house. When my mind starts focusing on those things, I stop talking to God.

Today's reading talks about using my voice when talking to God (3). There is something special about talking to God out loud. My thoughts are more organized. I remember my words. I stay focused. When I pray out loud, God becomes more real to me.

And that is important for knowing God. If all our prayers take place silently, in our heads, we start thinking that God only exists in our heads. We start forgetting that God is real and he exists outside of our minds. Our regular practice should be to pray aloud – by ourselves, before car trips, at mealtimes, and at bedtimes. If you think about it, since prayer is a conversation with God, shouldn't that be done with your voice? When was the last time you had a face-to-face conversation with someone without speaking?

Use your voice the next time you start to pray. Thank God out loud for another day of life. Say to God with your voice, "You are my King and my God" (2)! There is nothing wrong with praying silently but speaking our prayers is a tool for us.

# JULY 10

## *Psalm 11*



**T**ODAY'S READING REMINDS US THAT GOD IN CHARGE NO MATTER WHAT.

I've owned two pets, but I only remember one, Boo Boo. She was an easily excited border collie mix, who tinkled with excitement whenever there was a knock on the door! You could pet her head, scratch her belly or under her chin, but nothing calmed her down. She was playful, loyal, and loved to fetch rocks and sticks.

High school and early college days are where people ask big questions like what career to pursue and who to marry. With Boo Boo, I didn't have to answer those questions. She just wanted to know I was going to give her food and play with her!

On the day she died, I was working. I knew she'd been ill. My dad took her to the vet and had to put her down. When I talked to him on the phone, he was holding back tears, and I was too.

Part of me seemed to change during that phone call. Something inside me was different from then on. I wouldn't see Boo Boo at home. I wouldn't say good night to her. She wouldn't sleep in my room. The old foundation was chipped away; this was new ground.

We all trust that certain things will be there when we get home from school or work, but when those things are gone, we start re-thinking about who we are and what we believe. In the midst of my grief, I remembered God was not distant; God was closer than a friend or even a beloved pet, and in control of all situations.

When you go through hardships, remember that nobody likes hard times. Nobody wakes up excited about difficulties of the day. When your circumstances are difficult, know that God sees the whole picture. I know that those circumstances are for your good and his glory.

# JULY 11

## *Psalm 15*



**S**OMETIMES REJECTION IS NO BIG DEAL.  
SOMETIMES REJECTION IS SERIOUS BUSINESS.

When you are rejected, somehow you didn't meet requirements.

"I'm sorry, but we're sold out."

"We don't have a reservation for you."

"Credit application denied."

"We're not hiring."

Today's psalm begins with, "Who gets to be with God" (1)? Then it answers the question by describing those who will "dwell on your holy hill." The person that gets to be with God is blameless.

A blameless person is someone who can't be accused of anything. This person has more than a good reputation - a perfect reputation and without fault. Then the psalm gives more detail: good deeds, no gossip, positive attitude, not influenced by evil, keeps his word, generous, fears the Lord, and honest. This goes beyond the Ten Commandments. This person is all-the-way perfect.

Only the blameless person gets to be with God. Only the one who is completely perfect can dwell with the Lord.

Human beings are not blameless. Jesus commands us to be perfect (Matthew 5:48), but because we are completely full of sin, we will fail on our own. There is only one way we can have perfection applied to our account: God must do it. God has done it through Jesus Christ. His perfection is applied to our imperfection. His blamelessness is applied to our *blamefulness*.

Trusting that God has done this is the first step to becoming a Christian. Ask God to help you display the character traits of a blameless person today.

# JULY 12

## *Psalm 19*



**F**OR SOMETHING TO BE ACCEPTABLE, IT HAS TO MEET CERTAIN REQUIREMENTS.

Food has to pass quality assurance to be acceptable. Cars have to be inspected to be accepted by the state. A passing grade is given to those who have turned in work that was acceptable to the teacher.

Today's verse asks God to help the singer's words and heart to be acceptable, specifically in worship. In the previous verses, he remembered that God's words are special. They are so special that if they were food, his words would be the most delicious. They are so special that if they were money, his words would be more valuable than millions of dollars.

The singer does not want his words to be equal to God's but he does want his own words to be at least pleasing to God. That means his heart has to match his words. He wants to be genuine with the Lord. The singer is not trying to impress the people at church. He is not trying to get God's attention by using big words or a loud voice. He just wants to get real with the Lord.

To help our words and heart to get real with the Lord, we can follow the outline of Psalm 19 when we pray:

- "O Lord, your earth and your sun and your stars all say that you are amazing."
- "O Lord, your words are perfect and true."
- "O Lord, forgive me for doing things you told me not to do in your word."
- "O Lord, let my words and thoughts be acceptable to you."

We will affect the world outside of church when our words and hearts are acceptable to the Lord in church. Like the heavens and the skies, we start declaring God's glory with our lives.

# JULY 13

## *Psalm 27*



**I**N KING DAVID'S TIME, THE TABERNACLE WAS WHERE GOD'S PRESENCE WAS REVEALED IN A SPECIAL WAY UNDER SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

Some things just grab our attention. It is like we are frozen in place and can't turn our eyes away. When I first flew in an airplane, I couldn't stop looking out the window. I had only seen clouds from the ground looking up, but now I could see clouds from the sun's point of view! I was amazed. I wanted to look at everything but my eyes just couldn't take in enough of the sky.

Maybe you've looked up in the sky on a really clear, dark night and were amazed at seeing so many stars. Your eyes wanted to look and look and look but you just couldn't take it all in.

This is similar to King David experiencing dwelling "in the house of the Lord" (4). The house of the Lord was the tabernacle (or temple) and there was something unique that happened there.

Only one man could enter the holy of holies (the inner part of the temple) once a year, and he had to be clean according to certain rules. While in there, God would reveal his presence to the man by showing him his glory. It was such a special event that David describes it as a life-long desire that he will "seek after".

Nowadays, because we have the Holy Spirit, God's presence isn't a once-a-year event. As followers of Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit in us all the time. King David longed for an experience like that. He wanted to know and feel God's presence with him all the time.

We look forward to the day when we don't just have the Holy Spirit inside of us – we will see the Lord like we see a person standing in front of us. We will want to look and look, but our eyes won't be able to take it all in. And that will be completely satisfying!



# JULY 14

## *Psalm 30*



**W**HEN I AM ANGRY WITH SOMEONE, IT USUALLY MEANS THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIP THAT IS NOT WORKING RIGHT.

I remember being angry with my little cousin when I was a kid. We had played together all day but he did something that just got on my nerves. I can't remember what it was but I remember that I was just mad at him. Maybe it was because he didn't want to play the game I did, or maybe because he wanted to go play with his friends and not include me. I think our playing together ended with pushing and shoving and punching each other in the shoulders.

I don't remember either of us saying we were sorry but by the next time our families got together, which was usually every week. We went right back to playing together as if nothing was wrong. That's the way it is with close relationships. Restoration is so important that you are willing to forget whatever wrong you may have suffered.

That's the way it is with God's anger. His relationship with us is so important, that he made a way for our relationship to be repaired. It is called forgiveness. God gets angry at us when we do something that is against his commands. Our sin is like a slap in God's face that says, "You don't care about me so I'm going to do this thing!" He is angry at us because that is untrue.

God's word is very clear that he loves us, cares for us, and gives us good things. Today's reading reminds us that when he is angry about something we did, we have to remember that behind that righteous anger is righteous love.

When you sin, be quick to confess it to God, and then ask for his forgiveness. If you really are sorry for breaking God's rules, he really will forgive you. Then you can start experiencing his favor again.

# JULY 15

## Psalm 34



**O**NE OF MY FAVORITE THINGS TO EAT IS A PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY SANDWICH!

My mom used to make me a PB&J every day when I was little. I still like them as an adult. I've had so many of them over the years, that I can imagine the look, smell, and taste. Not only do I like the qualities of that sandwich, I remember good things when I eat one. You could call it my *comfort food* because of that combination of yummy taste and good memories.

Food gives strength to do things, but it doesn't just recharge us. There is a delight in eating. There is also a delight in seeing and smelling, touching and hearing. God designed all of our senses in such a way to connect us to creation, and creation points to our Creator.

Today's verse reminds us that God doesn't want us to worship him with our minds. He wants us to worship him through our senses – our senses were made to immediately point us to God's goodness, especially taste.

Taste and smell are closely connected to our memories. They are so connected that when we get that "comfort food" feeling, things happen so fast that we don't even notice it. Memories flood our brains. Good feelings bring a smile to our face. You don't have to think about it to get your mouth to water. That's fast!

God wants us to trust him so fast that we don't have to think about it. God wants me to have satisfaction in him when I take a bite of PB&J. As I remember what food tastes like, so God wants me to remember who he is: worthy of trust, powerful to protect and save, and gives good things to his children.

The person that takes refuge in the Lord will find that the taste of his own life is a blessed flavor.

# JULY 16

## *Psalm 39*



**I**'M OLD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER WHEN "GOING TO THE MOVIES" WAS A BIG EVENT.

We didn't have video players at home or services like Netflix. We had to actually go to a movie theatre.

Watching movies is one of my favorite forms of entertainment. Movies are quicker than books. A book takes days to finish and a movie just takes two hours. However, movies can be bad for me - not just because of the images on the screen, showing violence or immodest clothing, but because of the time it involves.

I have thousands of movies to choose from at home, and start a show with the press of a few buttons but I don't have enough time to watch all the movies I find interesting. I could spend *days* watching! I could stay up late and watch them. I could watch during breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I could fill every hour with a movie or TV show.

Most people would agree that watching movies that much is not good for a person. But there are many forms of entertainment that can steal our time. Instead of movies, we could play video games. We could watch sports. We could play sports. We could watch the news. We could browse YouTube. We could browse Facebook. There are plenty of things that could entertain us and turn our minds away from godly things.

Verse 4 reminds us to be wise regarding how we use our time, "make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am!"

God wants us to find satisfaction in things that are true, right, and eternal. Start today by turning off the TV or your cell phone, iPad, or Facebook, and turn your attention to the Lord. Ask him to keep you from sin and to help you use your time wisely.

# JULY 17

## *Psalm 42*



### **T**HIRSTING FOR GOD IS LIKE A WARNING GOING OFF IN OUR SOULS.

I was part of a mission team serving overseas. My job was to lead the songs and puppet shows. We added movements to all the songs to help the kids remember the lyrics. Sometimes we would jump and wave our arms. Other times we would clap and turn around. It was quite a workout!

The weather was very hot and we got very thirsty. Where we served didn't have air conditioning, or fans, or even a breeze through the windows. All of us were dripping with sweat by the end of the day. I remember getting back to our rooms and wanting water. I didn't want pop or iced tea. I didn't even think about juice or milk. Yuck! All I could think about was water. I was thirsty and my mind was fixed on getting water.

God designed our bodies to desire the nutrients we need. When we need water, then that is all we can think about. We desire it. A desire for water is a desire to live.

Today's verse reminds us that when we are not connecting with God, when our relationship with him is dry because of sin, circumstances, or hardship, our thirst for him should grow.

Going to church is the first step to satisfying that thirst. We can be encouraged to obey him more and more when we are around other people who read his word and do what it says. The next steps would be reading the Bible on your own, admitting your sins to God, and asking him to guide your steps.

When your soul alarms start going off, get right with God right away. Our souls aren't satisfied until we meet with him and our relationship is renewed.

# JULY 18

## *Psalm 46*



**P**SALM 46 STARTS BY LOOKING AT THE THREAT OF THE EARTH COMING APART THROUGH FLOODS AND EARTHQUAKES.

The ground is in such turmoil that there seems to be no safe place to stand. It is either shaking apart, sliding into the sea, or being covered with flood water. But the singer is not worried because he knows that God is bigger and stronger than all of that.

Then we see that God is not just in control of the earth but he is in control of the nations. Countries make wars but God will stop their fighting and break all their weapons. No matter how much trouble they stir up, they are no match for the commander of the angel-armies, the Lord of hosts.

Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth" (10)!

In this climax of the song, God finally speaks and tells the nations to be still. Another way to say this is "STOP!" This is a command to stop fighting each other and stop worrying about your safety. It is a command to stop and realize that God is God.

These last words of the song tell us the Lord's ultimate plan: he will be worshiped by all the nations no matter how much they fight and he will be worshiped in the earth no matter how much it breaks apart.

This is a big picture perspective. I should not be afraid of hurricanes and earthquakes because my God is in control. I should not be afraid of riots and crime and terrorists because my God is in control of that, too. We just need to stop, be still, and remember that he is God.

# JULY 19

## *Psalm 51*



**M**OVIES HAVE A HARD TIME SHOWING HUMILITY AND BROKENNESS BECAUSE ADMITTING WE WERE WRONG IS A HARD THING TO DO.

There is a scene in the movie, “Megamind,” about asking for forgiveness. Megamind, the bad guy, is rejected by the girl he likes. His efforts to get her attention have cost him his closest friend, Minion, and now he returns to his hideout to try to repair the friendship. Instead of saying that he was wrong, he calls out to Minion, “You were right. I was less right.”

King David wrote Psalm 51 after being caught doing something wrong. The first thing he did was admit to God that what he did was wrong.

What does a person do after confessing sin? This psalm gives the answer and it starts with understanding that a person cannot repay God. There is no good deed you can do to make up for the wrong deed you did. Of course there is a debt to pay God when a person sins but no one can pay that debt except God, himself. He forgives not because of what you do to make up for it. He forgives because of what he has done to pay for it. Jesus paid for your sin.

David says that he would pay for his own sin if he could. He would give what we would call a lot of money to the church offering, but he knows that is not what God wants. God wants our hearts to be humble and broken so that we start to desire his ways and obey his directions.

The next time you do something wrong, don’t let your pride call it “less right.” Call it what God calls it: sin. Confess it to him, remember he paid for your sins, and know that you owe him your life.

# JULY 20

## *Psalm 56*



**W**ARRIORS SEEM TO BE THE TOUGH GUYS IN STORIES. THEY ARE THE ONES WHO ARE STRONG AND UNSTOPPABLE.

There is a story in the Bible about King David that doesn't fit the warrior image of King David. David fled Saul and went out of Israel to take refuge in a city of the Philistines, the enemy of Israel. The Philistines realized that they had the well-known warrior in their midst and could put him to death. David realized the only way of escape was to pretend that he was crazy. He played the part, even letting spit run down his beard, and the king let him go (1 Samuel 21).

Was David any less a warrior while he was pretending to be crazy? No. He didn't lose his fighting skills. He didn't ask God for super strength like Samson and then kill all the bad guys. He used his mind and trusted God for the outcome.

Today's psalm comes from that story. David was surrounded by enemies. He felt the pressure that comes when you know there are people all around you that want to hurt you. Instead of being afraid, he sets his mind on trusting in God.

Our biggest battle happens in our minds when our fears take over and we stop trusting God. We imagine our circumstances have gotten out of God's control. Remember that God is always in control.

David said, "What can man do to me?" Even if people hurt me or kill me, they can't hurt my soul. God protects my soul and no one can take me away from God. This is a warrior's confidence. A warrior trusts in his commander. A warrior has feelings but trusts the Lord more than his feelings.

When you feel yourself getting afraid, stop and remember that your commander cares for you.

# JULY 21

## *Psalm 63*



**I**F WE AREN'T SURE WHAT TO DO IN A WORSHIP SERVICE, THEN WE CAN LOOK AT HOW WORSHIP WAS DONE IN THE PSALMS.

Today's psalm has two actions.

**The first action is singing (3).** Some people think that only good singers should sing and bad singers should stay quiet. That is wrong. That is like saying that only good ball players should play ball. You might not lead the team but you play because you love the game. In the same way, you might not lead the singing but you sing to the Lord because you love the Lord.

**The second action is lifting up our hands (4).** Some people think that lifting your hands in worship, especially during singing, brings too much attention to yourself. That is wrong thinking. That is like saying you shouldn't help the poor because that would bring too much attention to yourself. To put another way, you shouldn't do the right thing because you will always do it for the wrong reason.

I found that the best way to think about lifting hands in worship is to picture a little child reaching up to her mommy because she just wants to be held. She knows where the love is and she reaches for it. Is she afraid that everyone will suddenly find out that she loves her mommy? She doesn't care if everyone knows. She just wants love.

You can't hide lifting your hands, but I think that is the point. People will see you lift your hands to worship the Lord and they will be encouraged to worship the Lord with that kind of enthusiasm.

The next time you are in a worship service, sing with excitement to the Lord, and try lifting your hands up to him with desire like a child.



# JULY 22

## *Psalm 66*



**S**MELLS ARE LIKE MEMORIES – THEY ARE VERY NOTICEABLE AT FIRST BUT QUICKLY FADE.

I love the smell of freshly baked bread! My mind runs through all kinds of great memories at just a little hint of fresh bread, but the longer I stay in the kitchen and smell the bread, the less I notice how wonderful it smells.

Most people find it easier to remember the bad and sad in the world instead of the great and good. When something good happens to a person, we need to hear about it through testimony.

A testimony is when you talk about a hard time that changed you for the better. When I hear you talk about a hard situation, how God brought you through it, and how you changed after it, your testimony influences my courage.

Psalms is filled with testimonies. In today's reading, the singer had gone through troubles, but he knew the Lord was with him. "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul" (16). The singer remembered what God had done before. He prayed to God and knew that God heard him. The singer survived the hard time with stronger faith.

The church needs to hear how you praised God in good times *and* hard times. The church needs to hear your testimony because memories fade away like the smell of fresh bread. The sweet smell is great at first, but we get used to it and don't notice it. God is doing wonderful things around us, but we need to be reminded.

Start giving your testimonies at home. Tell your family and friends what God has done for you. Share your testimony with other Christians at church. They need to hear how you trusted in God, and how God took care of you.

# JULY 23

## *Psalm 72*



**G**OOD LEADERS ARE ALWAYS THINKING ABOUT HOW THEIR DECISIONS COULD HELP OR HURT THOSE THEY LEAD.

We make decisions every day, and those decisions guide how our day goes. Good decisions usually bring good days that you hope will never end. Bad decisions usually bring bad days that never end.

Leaders are decision makers. For example, good parents are always thinking about how to help their children to grow in a healthy way. God put all parents in charge of their children. God put some people in charge of larger groups like businesses and towns. God puts even fewer people in charge of even larger groups like countries. Some countries call those rulers kings. In our country, the one person that comes closest to a king is called the president.

Psalm 72 is a long prayer for a perfect king to govern a nation. The prayer asks for the king to have good character, the citizens to get along, the nation's wealth to be great, and that the poor will be looked after. All of these are important for a country to prosper.

Verse 19 focuses on the purpose of this excellent king of this amazing nation. God wants to display this great nation so the whole world will see and give glory to God; only he could give the rulers wisdom to govern well, make the land grow such amazing crops, and turn the country's enemies into allies.

The king mentioned in this psalm seems too good to be true because some of the psalm talks about a perfect ruler who will come in the future. That perfect ruler has come. He is king Jesus and one day he will return and rule over all the nations instead of just one country.

Let this psalm guide your prayers for the leaders of our country. They need us to ask God to help them make wise decisions every day.

# JULY 24

## *Psalm 73*



**A**S WE COME TO KNOW OUR LORD, WE DISCOVER MORE AND MORE EACH DAY JUST HOW GOOD OUR GOD IS TO US.

The psalmist declares what all God has done and will continue to do for us if we will just obey and follow his commands and trust him. The enemy is out to destroy God's people, but God is there to protect his own. Those that mock God will be judged by him in his timing.

In Psalm 73, our Lord reminds us that he is always with us. He promises to never leave us, nor forsake us. He holds us up by his right hand and guides us with his counsel. There is none like him and there is nothing to desire more than him.

I am so glad that our heavenly father is there to help us through the difficult times as well as the good times. As you wake each morning, and then close your eyes each evening, remember the words of the psalmist, "but as for me, it is good to be near God" (28). Remember, God is good all the time, and all the time God is good.

Father, help me to remember how good you have been and to trust you to guide me in my daily life. Allow my day to begin with you, and to end with you, knowing your goodness and mercy. Amen.

# JULY 25

## *Psalm 81,84*



**S**ING FOR JOY AND FOR GOD'S GREAT LOVE,  
FOREVER!

I love to sing. In fact, I have grown up all my life surrounded by music. My grandparents and parents taught me to love music at a young age. Music has become such a wonderful part of my life and a way for me to give back to my heavenly father the joy that he has given to me through music.

As you read these passages, you find that God has done so much for his people. We should respond back with singing and shouting of joy from our hearts.

The psalmist declares, "how lovely is his dwelling place" that it should cause our hearts to yearn for the courts of heaven (84:1). They are to declare the faithfulness of God through all generations.

Where is your joy today? Is it in things of this earth, or do you yearn for the things and joy of heaven? "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere" (84:10). Let your joy overflow into singing of his praise. Let the music begin.

Father, thank you for the gift of music, and may my voice raise up joy to you. May I yearn for your courts and declare your faithfulness to my generation, and generations to come. Amen

# JULY 26

## *Psalm 90-91*



**W**HAT A COMFORT TO KNOW THAT GOD IS OUR DWELLING PLACE. HE IS OUR REFUGE AND OUR FORTRESS.

In the book of John, chapters 13-14, Jesus announced to his disciples that he was going away and would be crucified. Their hearts began to be troubled. Jesus knowing their hearts begins encouraging them that he was going to prepare a place for them, and that if he would prepare a place for them, he would come back and receive them unto him. What an encouragement that must have been to hear from their master's voice.

We have that same encouragement given to us. One of these days Jesus is coming back to take us home to be with him forever. The Psalmist declares the Lord is our dwelling place, and those who dwell there in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the almighty God. We have nothing to fear for He covers us with his feathers, and under his wings we find refuge. The psalmist says that if we make God our refuge, then he will protect us from harm (91:9-10). His angels will keep watch over us and guard our steps. Trust the father and make your dwelling place in him.

Father, thank you for being my refuge and my shelter. I long to be in your house and dwell with you forever. Help me to be encouraged, knowing you are building me a dwelling place in heaven. Amen.

# JULY 27

## *Psalm 92*



**W**E ARE TO SING FOR JOY AT THE WORKS OF GOD'S HANDS. ARE YOU PRAISING HIM FOR ALL THAT HE HAS DONE FOR YOU LATELY?

"It is good to give thanks to the LORD And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High" (1).

Psalms are filled with praises to God almighty. We are commanded to give him praise. He deserves our praise and adoration.

I remember someone asking me once if when I rose in the morning, do I say, "good lord, it's morning," or, "good morning, Lord." The psalmist in verse 1 and 2 of chapter tells us to give God praise both in the morning and in the evening for his love, his goodness, and his faithfulness. For God makes us glad for the deeds that he does in us and through us.

One of these days we will all be singing his praise together as we gather around his throne. Our God is a great God and worthy to be praised. I am reminded of the song, "How Great is Our God." We are to sing his praises loud enough together that all those around may hear then how great our God is.

Are you praising him so that others may know? "Then sings my soul, my savior God, to thee, how great thou art."

Oh God, you are great and greatly to be praised. Help me to praise your name so that all around me may know you. May my praise be lifted up to you as a sweet smelling fragrance, and may you receive all the glory and all the honor. Amen.

# JULY 28

## *Psalm 100*



**B**ECAUSE OF GOD'S GOODNESS AND FAITHFULNESS, PSALMS ENCOURAGE US TO SING AND SHOUT FOR JOY TO THE LORD.

July through August is the hottest time of the year, but it is also the time when farmers begin to harvest some of their crops and begin to see the fruit of their labor. It is at this time of year we are reminded again of how good our God is to us.

In Psalm 100:5, we are given three reasons to praise and give thanks to our heavenly father.

**1. We are to praise and give thanks for our God is good.** The scriptures point out that God always has our best interest at his heart. Our God is good all the time.

**2. We are to praise his name because his great love endures forever.** In the book of John, we see the love of the Father by sending his one and only son to die in our place. Oh the love of God endures forever.

**3. We are to give thanks because his faithfulness continues to all generations.** Our children and grandchildren can know of the faithfulness of our God. Today as you enjoy the bountiful supply that God has given you through various ways, be sure to stop and give him thanks and praise.

Father, I want to pause and thank you for your goodness, your great love, and your faithfulness that you have shown unto me. Help me to never forget all you have done. Amen

# JULY 29

## *Psalm 103*



**W**HEN IT COMES TO GETTING A JOB, WE WANT TO KNOW FIRST WHAT THE BENEFITS ARE, AND WHAT ALL WE WILL GET FROM THEM.

The same is true with the Christian life. When we receive Jesus Christ into our life, we are blessed with so many benefits from our heavenly Father. The psalmist list several benefits that God bestows upon our life the moment we put our trust in him.

**He forgives our sin.** God forgives *all* of our sins. What a blessing! The burden has been lifted.

**He heals our diseases.** Our God is the great physician. He has healed us of that disease of sin that has been passed down from the beginning of Genesis with Adam.

**He has redeemed our life from the pit.** Our sin had left us in a pit unable to get out, but God in his great mercy reached down and pulled us out of the miry pit, and set our feet upon the rock. That rock is Jesus. Praise the Lord.

**He pours out his love and compassion for us.** It's stated many time throughout the Psalms and shown to us in the New Testament through Jesus. God is gracious and abounding in his love for us in that he will remember our sins no more.

**He satisfies our desires for the good things of God.** He gives us strength to soar above our weaknesses like the eagles flying high above the earth.

Have you given much thought to God's benefits? If not, stop and bless his name.

Thank you father for all the benefits you have given to us. Help me to never take for granted what you have done. May I continue to bless your name. Amen.



# JULY 30

## *Psalm 108, 113*



**S**O MANY PSALMS HAVE LED MUSICIANS TO WRITE AND COMPOSE SONGS USING THEIR LYRICS FROM THE VERSES FOUND.

One such song is the Michael W. Smith song, “Forever.” Some of its lyrics come from Psalm 113:3.

From the rising to the setting sun  
His love endures forever  
By the grace of God we will carry on  
His love endures forever  
Sing praise, sing praise

We are to be reminded that from the moment we awake to the moment we lie back down, his love will never cease. His love and grace will endure forever. This is why the psalmist in chapter 108 tells us to make music in our hearts. To sing for all to hear. For his love is higher than the heavens and his faithfulness reaches beyond the skies (1). His glory is to be seen over all the earth.

In the Lord’s prayer, Jesus instructed his disciples that when we pray, the Father is to receive all the glory, and all the power, and all the honor. When we give him all the glory, when we exalt him first, then he will give us a song to sing and the ability to make melody in our hearts for him.

Are you making melodies in your soul for the Lord of lords?

Father thank you for the songs that you give. Thank you for making melodies in our hearts to sing. Thank you for your steadfast love that endures forever. May you be praised. Amen.

# JULY 31

## *Psalm 116-118*



**G**OD HEARS THE CRIES OF HIS PEOPLE. HE WILL NOT FORSAKE US OR LEAVE US.

It amazes me how in a crowded room a mother can hear the cries of her baby above all the clamor and noise. This is the way of our heavenly Father. He not only hears our cry for mercy, but as the psalmist points out, God turns his ear towards us and saves us. Because of this, the psalmist loves the Lord and will call upon him as long as he lives.

The Lord is full of compassion towards his people and protects those in need. There have been many difficult times in my life, when I thought I would never make it through to the next day, yet his faithfulness continues to endure.

How can we repay the Lord for all he has done? Well, in reality we can't. But we can, as the psalmist says in chapter 116, continue to serve him with all our being, even unto our doing breath. We are to continue to praise his name among all those we come in contact with.

Lift up his name among the nations. Proclaim his faithfulness to all peoples. "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, and his love endures forever" (1). When we cry out to him with a sincere heart, he hears us.

Father, hear my cry. Come and rescue me from my troubles. Surround me with your loving kindness and your compassion that I may praise your name, and that all those around me may see your great glory. Amen.

# AUGUST 1

## *Psalm 119*



**W**E NEED TO READ AND STUDY GOD'S WORD  
MORE AND MORE.

As August rolls in, and we get closer to the fall and winter, times of daylight will continually shorten. This means it gets darker sooner in the evenings, making paths hard to see. We begin to leave the porch lights on, and at times need a flash light, so that we will not stumble in the dark.

The Christian walk is similar. As we travel this dark world, we need God's Word to light the way for our paths. The psalmist states how much he loves the Word of the Lord. He meditates on it all day long. He memorizes it so that he will not forget God's precepts. Even the commands make him wiser than his enemies as he studies. It gives him more insight than his teachers and more understanding than the elders of his time. It keeps him from stumbling when temptation comes.

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The psalmist says that God's Word is sweeter than honey to our mouths. When is the last time you have tasted the Word of God? Try it and allow his Word to be the light to your paths.

Father, thank you for your Word. Help me to submerge deeper into your Word, and make it a light to my paths. Allow your Word to penetrate into my heart, that I may know you even more. Amen.

# AUGUST 2

## *Psalm 121, 124*



**H**ELP COMES FROM THE LORD, WHO IS THE  
MAKER OF HEAVEN AND THE EARTH.

The psalmist lifts up his eyes and sees the Lord is there to help. He calls upon the Lord, and the Lord hears him in his distress, helping him to not let his foot slip.

When the Israelites were freed to leave Egypt, God led them through the desert. He protected them during the day with a cloud to shield them from the burning heat, and a pillar of fire by night to guide them with light.

We have this assurance that God not only hears us, but is watching over us, and will keep us from harm. When we close our eyes at night, we have a God who neither slumbers or sleeps as the psalmist states. He watches over us both day and night. As we lift up our eyes towards heaven, God is already waiting to reach out and save us.

Where does your help come from? Are you trusting in things of this world to protect you? As the psalmist says, “our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (124:8). Lift up your eyes to the Lord.

Father, you are the only one who I can go to for help. Thank you for hearing my cries for mercy. I come to you. Have your way in my life. Amen.

# AUGUST 3

## *Psalm 128*



**W**HAT DOES IT TAKE TO HAVE A GOOD MARRIAGE? DOES IT TAKE MONEY? FAME? FORTUNE? LOTS OF KIDS? A GOOD JOB?

I believe the psalmist gives us a pretty good picture of what it takes to have a good marriage, “Blessed are those that fear the Lord and walk in his ways” (1). When we fear the Lord and keep his commands, then he blesses us in many ways. This is not a name it and claim it, but rather doing what the Lord commands.

The psalmist goes on then to say because of doing this, his labor will be fruitful and his work will prosper. His wife will be like a fruitful vine in the home. In other words, she will be happy and faithful to her husband and caring for her children, and their children will be a blessing to their home.

Do you fear the Lord? Are you walking in his ways? Here is the secret, “The secret of the LORD [is] with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant” (Psalm 25:14). If you want a great marriage, then fear God with a reverent fear and walk in his ways.

Father, help me to have the right kind of fear for you, and to walk in your ways. Help me to be an example that my family can follow and learn of your ways. Amen.

# AUGUST 4

## *Psalm 135*



**H**OW GREAT IS YOUR GOD? WE HAVE A KING WHO IS CLOTHED IN MAJESTY, COVERED IN LIGHT, AND FROM AGE TO AGE HE STANDS WITH TIME IN HIS HAND.

The psalmist begins with praise to the Lord, and calls on all who serve God to praise him. The Lord is great and greater than any other god.

The song “How Great Is Our God,” by Chris Tomlin, describes almighty God. The verse begins with the words “The splendor of a king, clothed in majesty.” We are to sing the praises of his name for our God is great. The song continues talking about how the darkness tries to hide from the one who is the light, and trembles at his voice.

How great is our God! He is above all kings and kingdoms. He strikes down nations and kingdoms, just like he did against Pharaoh of Egypt, and all its armies (8). His name will endure forever. He is the beginning and the end. He is Alpha and Omega; the first and the last. We, who have washed our robes in the blood of the Christ, will all be kneeling before the throne of God, and laying our crowns at his feet, singing of how great the Lamb of God is.

Will you sing with me, so that all will see how great is our God?

Father, you are great, and greatly to be praised. Thank you for who you are and how great you are. Show your greatness through my life, that you may be praised and receive all the glory. Amen.

# AUGUST 5

## *Psalm 136*



**H**ERE IN PSALMS, WE HAVE A GREAT STORY THAT NEVER ENDS.

Our God is good and his love never ends. The psalmist continues his story of giving thanks to the Lord, the God of gods, the Lord of lords, the one who created all things, the one who created the stars that light up the sky, the sun by day and the moon by night. He is the one who led his people out of bondage. He carried them with his mighty outstretched arm. He is the one who guided them to the promised land. He is the one who drove out and conquered kings and kingdoms. He is the one to lift up praise to because of the answer he gives after each verse, “his love endures forever.”

If God did all this for the nation of Israel, how much more will his love endure for us. We can continue to praise his name, for truly he is the Lord of lords and King of kings. His love is from everlasting to everlasting, and from generation to generation. His story for us is a never ending story of is love.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). We have the never ending assurance, “for I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

Are you a part of God’s never ending story of his love?

Father, thank you for your never ending love. Help me to share your love with all those I come in contact with. May I praise your name forever. Amen.

# AUGUST 6

## *Psalm 143*



**H**EAR MY PRAYER, O LORD; GIVE EAR TO MY  
PLEAS FOR MERCY! IN YOUR FAITHFULNESS  
ANSWER ME, IN YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!" (1)

The psalmist declares that he is crying aloud to the Lord and lifting up his prayers of mercy to the one who is faithful and righteous. He makes his requests known and pleads with the Lord to deliver him from his enemies ; to give him strength for each day. He asks to be taught to do the Lord's will.

Our lord and savior, Jesus Christ, spent many hours in prayer while on this earth. He needed that quality time with his father for strength to do God's will. It was a time to be refreshed.

How is your prayer life? Are you pleading with the one who is faithful to hear and answer your prayers? Are you gaining strength by spending time with the one who gives strength in times of weakness? Take time to be alone with almighty God. He is waiting and wanting to have fellowship with you. Like the old hymn song says,

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!  
that calls me from a world of care,  
and bids me at my Father's throne  
make all my wants and wishes known.  
In seasons of distress and grief,  
my soul has often found relief,  
and oft escaped the tempter's snare  
by thy return, sweet hour of prayer!

Father, thank you for the privilege of prayer and being able to have fellowship with you. Help me take time alone to gain strength and knowledge that come from spending time with you. Amen.



# AUGUST 7

## *Psalm 150*



**I** NOTICE THE BOOK OF PSALMS BEGINS WITH BLESSINGS ON MAN, IF HE FOLLOWS AFTER GOD, AND ENDS WITH EVERYTHING PRAISING GOD.

Psalm 150 begins with praising the Lord and ends with praising the Lord. I also notice that God's entire Word begins with God and ends with God. That's it in a nutshell.

God has always been and will always be. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Our entire existence is for giving God praise. He deserves our praise. He is to be praised for his mighty acts. He is to be praised for his surpassing greatness. We are to praise him with everything we have, and with every kind of instrument. Sometimes we get hung up on what can or cannot be used to give God praise, but in this Psalm it is not about what is used, but rather all about praising the one who created everything to praise him.

Are you praising him today? He is the one who created you for his praise. Don't complain about how praise is done. Rather, join in, sing, shout, play an instrument, or just clang a cymbal in his name. One of these days, we will sing a new song of praise to him. Will you be a part of the assembly of the saints giving praise to the King?

Father, thank you for the Psalms and how you have created me to praise your name. Help me to lead others in praising your great name. Amen.

# AUGUST 8

## *Proverbs 1-2*



**T**HE BOOK OF PROVERBS IS A WORK COMPRISED OF HEBREW POETRY.

Proverbs were written largely as educational literature for young men under instruction in Israel. The central theme is wisdom. Maturity, responsibility, and wisdom were crucial to growing up to become God-honoring members of society.

The Hebrew word for wisdom is *hokmah*. We think wise individuals are the ones with many degrees. However, intellectual knowledge is not what the Jews had in mind. *Hokmah* carried the connotation of intellectual knowledge and practical skill. It was correct knowledge that led to correct action. True wisdom impacts the whole person, and gives a healthy heart and healthy hands.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (1:7). Do you view a healthy, reverent fear of God as the beginning to your wisdom? Fear of the Lord must be the beginning for us in all of life. The beginning of wisdom is a proper relationship with our Creator. He must be the highest priority.

Your devotion to read this devotion evidences the fact that you’re seeking to put the Lord as a first priority. But does he remain there throughout each day?

I walk my children to school most mornings. It’s a short stroll to their elementary school. For a while, I had a continual problem with them fighting over who got to school first. All of them wanted to get there in first place. I yelled as they ran, clawed, tripped, and punched their way to first place. The solution was for me to take first place, every morning. Second place behind dad wasn’t nearly as appealing. The selfish race for first was over because it was understood that the father would always be first. May it be true in your life.

# AUGUST 9

## *Proverbs 3-4*



**W**ISDOM IS AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TRAIT TO HAVE WHEN MAKING CRUCIAL DECISIONS IN OUR LIVES.

Wisdom is a lifelong goal that we chase. We can never be too wise and it's best to realize that we can always stand to grow, no matter how advanced we perceive ourselves to be.

We wake up, decide what we will wear, how we will fix our hair, as well as a myriad of other small decisions. Some decisions are more substantial than others: where we will go to school, who we will marry, what career path we will choose, whether or not to change jobs, etc. These infinite *big* life decisions cannot only impact our futures but also the futures of others around us. Knowing these decisions can potentially have such lasting effects, it may be easy for the stress of certain decisions to paralyze us with terrorizing fear as opposed to reverent fear of the Lord.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." In this passage, "ways" could also be translated as "roads" or "courses." So this proverb is instructing us to acknowledge the Lord in all our roads or directions. So when we're faced with a decision, we ought not think of it so much as in terms of right or wrong, but rather God-acknowledging or not. If two options are equally God-acknowledging, then we are biblically free to choose either option!

When we are in Christ, we are truly free to make choices that are glorifying to God, something an unbeliever cannot do. What a remarkable privilege! To make God-glorifying decisions testifies to the gospel and allows others to see Christ in us.

# AUGUST 10

## *Proverbs 5-7*



**A**DULTERY, AND SEXUAL SIN IN GENERAL, IS A GRIEVOUS SIN IN GOD'S EYES.

1 Corinthians 6:18 tells us to, “flee sexual immorality.” Given that Proverbs was primarily written to young men, it should not surprise us that the book is filled with warnings to avoid sexual misconduct.

Sexual perversion is everywhere in our culture today. It's always been there, but it's simply widely accepted now. We're forced to reckon with public objectification of women and men, homosexuality, pornography creeping into the public square, and more. The author of Proverbs knew well the temptations his pupils faced.

- “For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey ...” (5:3)
- “... the smooth tongue of the adulteress” (6:24)
- “... do not let her capture you with her eyelashes.” (6:25)
- “My husband is not at home ...” (7:19)
- “With much seductive speech she persuades him ...” (7:21)

Most who are unfaithful in marriage do not start out with bad intentions, but with innocent conversations that gradually turns inappropriate and sinful. Flirty text messages and sinful websites are easy allures at the touch of our fingertips. Ask God how you can safeguard your marriage. Even if you're single, seek purity so that your marriage health can be established now.

God designed sex to be enjoyed within his holy gift of marriage. He encourages us to be loyal to our spouses in Proverbs 6:18-19, “Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.” What vivid imagery! An alcoholic feels a deep need to be intoxicated by strong drink. God's desire is for us to be addicted to our spouses, unable to live apart from them.

# AUGUST 11

## *Proverbs 8*



**I**F THE UNIVERSE BE CREATED IN WISDOM, IT WOULD BE FOOLISH FOR US TO NEGLECT WISDOM.

Wisdom is personified in Proverbs 8, and tells of her beginnings. Wisdom has her beginning with God; wisdom comes from God. Wisdom *speaks* in this passage of being present with God as he created everything. The idea is that wisdom is ultimately a character trait of God that he allows us to pursue and possess.

Verse 35 says, “For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord.” This shows us that we should be chasing after wisdom, striving to obtain it. This doesn’t come easy; it takes work. That is why the Christian should be a dedicated student of the word of God, for in the scriptures we find wisdom. Paul wrote to Timothy encouraging him to, “...continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

Paul points out that the sacred writings (the Bible) are able to make us wise, but that wisdom comes through faith in Christ. We find wisdom by our foundation and persistence in Christ. The wise and prudent are not those that move on from Christ but those that remain in Christ and never get over the power of the cross and his resurrection. It shapes every day of our lives. “... You are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Rest deeply in the finished work of Christ today, and make a commitment to drink in the scriptures daily. There we find wisdom.

# AUGUST 12

## *Proverbs 9*



**I**T IS OFTEN EASY FOR US TO TAKE OUR EYES OFF OF WISDOM IN EXCHANGE FOR WHAT WE THINK TO BE GODLY TEACHING.

Hebrew poetry finds much of its beauty and rhythm in parallelism that utilizes similarities as well as antithetical ideas. Proverbs 9 lays out the case for wisdom by comparing and contrasting wisdom and folly. It is then up for us to choose which path we will walk in, and the choice couldn't be clearer. Again wisdom is personified as a woman and now folly, as well, is personified as a woman in which it would be wise to avoid.

Lady Wisdom sends out her young servants to beckon and invite all into her banquet to learn from her (3-4). "Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight" (6). Conversely, Madam Folly is loud and obnoxious. Instead of sending out welcoming servants, she lazily sits in her doorway, calling out to passersbys.

What is perhaps most difficult for us is that wisdom and folly often say the same things. The writer points out that the two women both call out, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here" (4,16)! Folly's strength is that she has learned to sound like wisdom and deceive seekers of wisdom. Don't be fooled. Do not find guidance in things that look Godly, but rather find guidance in God alone.

We can be subject to falling into snares of false teachers, though. We must test everything that we are learning against scripture, not merely our hearts or our feelings. As we read, listen to sermons, converse within our churches, let us ask God for discernment to recognize true wisdom that we may walk in it.

# AUGUST 13

## *Proverbs 10-12*



**S**OLOMON UNDERSTOOD THE SOURCE OF WISDOM, THAT IT ULTIMATELY CAME FROM GOD.

Solomon was a great king, and was most well known for his outstanding wisdom. The Lord appeared to him when he became the king of Israel and told him that he could ask for any gift from God. Solomon requested, “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people” (1 Kings 3:9)?

Solomon used his wisdom to govern God’s nation well and he also imparted it to others, largely recorded in the book of Proverbs. We are graced to be able to look through a collection of Solomon’s wise, memorable, and poetical sayings. These were used to teach valuable lessons in Israel and guide their lives.

At the heart of many of Solomon’s proverbs is the pursuit of righteousness. Fairness and upstanding morality are central themes of Solomon’s writing. Proverbs 11:19-21 demonstrates this theme:

“Whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live, but he who pursues evil will die. Those of crooked heart are an abomination to the Lord, but those of blameless ways are his delight. Be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished, but the offspring of the righteous will be delivered.”

Jewish understanding of righteousness had profound implications for everyday life. It did not merely mean avoiding sin, but also loving others, and dealing with one another justly. This idea impacted jobs, family, education, society, and more. Righteousness is found in Yahweh, the one true God. We serve a just and loving God, and he has created us in his image. We are to live and love like him.

# AUGUST 14

## *Proverbs 13-14*



**G**OD CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO BE CALM AND CALCULATED.

Think back to the last time that you observed someone get angry. As a spectator, it is often silly to see anger in others. From an outsider's perspective, we can see overreactions and unjustified wrath. However, when we are the ones who are angered, we are blinded by it and it's difficult to see clearly and think rationally.

Christians should have a habit of clearly thinking through situations before reacting. Proverbs 14:29 says, "Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly." Consciousness of our state of mind is crucial. If we are able to recognize when anger is taking over us, that is the first step to overtaking our temper.

One of my sons has an uncanny ability to recognize his state of mind. He's only five years old and it's remarkable to observe how aware he is of his actions. He doesn't blindly throw temper tantrums, but at least he's aware that he does it. He'll say things like, "Dad, I feel very angry and if I stay here I will get myself in trouble. May I go to my room instead?" I think he's wise beyond his years.

What if we recognized anger coming before it caused its damaging effects? In the moment, it always feels justified to act out on our anger. The key is not trusting what we feel. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" (14:12). Often, the best option is to remove ourselves from a stressful situation, not to totally ignore it, but to revisit in a cool, calm, and collected fashion later. "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20).



# AUGUST 15

## *Proverbs 15-16*



**C**ALVIN COOLIDGE SAID, “ONE OF THE FIRST LESSONS A PRESIDENT HAS TO LEARN IS THAT EVERY WORD HE SAYS WEIGHS A TON.”

I think that to be true not only of presidents, but of every person! Our words carry weight and we ought to choose them wisely.

A filter is a simple item that allows certain material to pass through its permeable screen while it catches larger material, denying it passage. We use filters for our heating and cooling systems, our vehicles, swimming pools, and much more.

Proverbs 15:2 says, “The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly.” Everyone has thoughts that should not be uttered out loud. The wise allow a filter to catch their impure thoughts before they hurt other people. Our thoughts can be sinful, in and of themselves, but refraining from uttering them leaves it between us and the Lord, instead of bringing harm to others.

Children say, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” Biblically, that cute saying is simply untrue. Words can be extremely hurtful and more damaging than physical pain. James says words have potential to set fire to people and bring unrighteousness, “... the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell” (James 3:6).

James and Solomon use strong words to condemn the unnecessary use of strong words. Make sure your words are pure and uplifting, always reflecting your savior. “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Ephesians 4:29).

# AUGUST 16

## *Proverbs 17-18*



**F**AMILY HAD A HIGH VALUE IN THE ISRAEL OF SOLOMON'S DAY, AND IT SHOULD HAVE A HIGH VALUE TO US TODAY AS WELL.

Proverbs 17:6 shares that, "Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the glory of children is their fathers." Children are one of the greatest joys of life. My wife and I have biological as well as adopted children, and we continually do foster care as well. We've seen first hand the joy (and sometimes pain) that children bring to our lives. Children bring vibrancy and further meaning to us.

And it's not just children. Sometimes we have siblings that bring us these close relationships, or maybe friends who feel like siblings to us. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (17:17). The point here is that tough times are made manageable by the people that God has placed around us. What a grace to us to have someone with us when we have to go through a trial!

Our spouses are also gifts from heaven to us, providing us partners for life. "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord" (18:22). I can testify that I have found favor from the God through my wife. Oftentimes, our most helpful tool of sanctification is our spouse keeping us serving the Lord.

Make sure to thank God for your family and close relationships today. They should take precedence over other relationships in your life, and they should know that they are priorities for you. Maybe today would be a good opportunity for a thoughtful text or kind word to let your most important people know that you're thankful for them.

# AUGUST 17

## *Proverbs 19-20*



**P**ROVERBS IS FULL OF WARNINGS AGAINST LAZINESS. GOD HAS DESIGNED US TO BE DILIGENT WORKERS.

Even before sin came into the world, there was work for Adam to do. He was created for God-glorifying work and part of our redemption is God's repurposing us from laziness to diligence.

Proverbs 20:13 says, "Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread." I must confess that I love sleep. My wife is continually amazed by my ability to sleep anytime, anywhere. I don't even have to be sleepy to sleep; I can nearly sleep at will. I'm never more in a state of serenity than when I have a good pillow under my neck and I'm able to stretch widely and then relax in a good bed.

But God hasn't built me for a bed; he's built me for his glory. All of life is work if we do it right. You glorify God in the work of your job. You glorify God in the work of your parenting. You glorify God in the work of your evangelism. You glorify God in the work of your home chores. God is magnified when we work well because we are operating the way He designed us.

Solomon has some humorous thoughts about those who try to make their living by minimal effort. "Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel" (20:17). Some become too lazy to even feed themselves: "The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to his mouth" (19:24).

Be a diligent worker today in whatever tasks lay ahead of you, and know that your work is accomplished to the glory of God.

# AUGUST 18

## *Proverbs 21-22*



**I**N TIMES OF DISAGREEMENT WITH MY WIFE, I MUST SAY THAT I'VE NEVER BEEN TEMPTED TO GO LIVE ON THE ROOF.

Proverbs 21:9 says, "It is better to live in a corner of the house-top than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife." I may be banished out of the bedroom, and to the couch, but the roof seems a bit extreme. Solomon is pointing out that a wife who is constantly sowing discord within the marital relationship does nothing but drive her husband further away.

He continues this idea in verse 19 of the same chapter, "It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman." As I read a verse like that, I imagine a man who lives in a desert land with a quarrelsome wife reading this and thinking, "What bad luck!"

To be sure, there's a message to wives here. A wife's goal should not be to constantly nag her husband into doing what he needs to do. Trust me, I know that husbands have many shortcomings. One of those shortcomings is not loving his wife like Christ loves the church. If husbands love their wives, wives respect their husbands. If wives respect their husbands, husbands love their wives. It's a beautiful, reciprocal relationship that God places us in when we are joined to another in marriage. If you're married, make sure you thank God for the gift of marriage today and do something special for your spouse. If you're not married, pray that you can honor the Lord and serve him in your singleness.

"However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Ephesians 5:33).

# AUGUST 19

## Proverbs 23-24



**B**UY TRUTH, AND DO NOT SELL IT; BUY WISDOM, INSTRUCTION, AND UNDERSTANDING” (23:23).

What a thought provoking proverb! We are to earnestly and with everything we have seek after truth, wisdom, instruction, and understanding. These things have their source in God alone and ultimately rest within the gospel message. We are to do everything in our power to attain more and more of that truth.

Solomon also writes that we are not to sell it. That implies that we should give it away freely! We work hard to attain more of the truth and we give it away freely to those who need it the most. In doing so, we can have a small part in God’s task of saving sinners, “Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter” (24:11). Those who do not have Christ are dead in their trespasses and sins. They are *stumbling* to their own slaughter and destruction and they are completely unaware of it. We need not make their journey to Christ more difficult. We are to give away the truth of the gospel liberally and freely.

Jesus tells a short parable about this principle, “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Matthew 13:44).

The kingdom of our great God is worth giving up everything we’ve ever had on earth to attain eternal life and help others attain eternal life, so that God may be glorified in taking sinners stumbling toward the slaughter and make them saints walking in holiness.

# AUGUST 20

## *Proverbs 25-26*



**A** CENTRAL THEME OF PROVERBS IS TO CHASE AFTER WISDOM AND THAT NATURALLY MEANS THE RESISTING OF FOLLY.

We are all prone to foolish and sinful behaviors. God has saved us from the eternal consequences of our own foolishness, but it is something that we will continually battle in this life. Proverbs 26:11 says, “Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.” Unfortunately, I think this verse is broad enough to encompass all of us.

So what is the *vomit* that you find yourself continually returning to? All of us have our favorite sins that nag at us even on our best days. We must yearn and strive for holiness and beg the Lord to give us strength to resist our own foolishness. But this is no easy task.

In the New Testament, the apostle Peter elaborates on this proverbial thought. He claims that ultimately it would be better for people to have never heard the gospel at all than to hear it, pretend to walk in it for a season, and return to their wickedness. “For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: ‘The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire’” (2 Peter 2:21-22).

Let us purely seek after the gospel each day that the Lord gives us. Let us start each day with a commitment to walk closer to Christ than yesterday, rather than closer to our past folly. Let us commit to take the message of hope to the hopeless, for in that mission we find a task to distract us from our own vomit and mire.

# AUGUST 21

*Proverbs 27-28*



**D**O NOT BOAST ABOUT TOMORROW, FOR YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT A DAY MAY BRING” (27:1).

We truly don’t know what tomorrow, or today, will hold.

September 11, 2001 seemed to be just another day. No one could have guessed that terrorist attacks would result in thousands of deaths. Plans laid for September 12 were significantly altered by the events of September 11. The world was never the same.

Only God knows what a day holds and our best course of action is to hold fast to his plans rather than our own. “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matthew 6:34).

When I was young, my mother sang in a bluegrass gospel band. She sang a song that still rings true to me:

I don’t know about tomorrow  
I just live from day to day  
I don’t borrow from the sunshine  
For its skies may turn to gray  
I don’t worry o’er the future  
For I know what Jesus said  
And today I’ll walk beside him  
For he knows what lies ahead  
Many things about tomorrow  
I don’t seem to understand  
But I know who holds tomorrow  
And I know who holds my hand

Embrace the uncertainty of today, but make sure to certainly embrace the one who holds each day.

# AUGUST 22

*Proverbs 29-30*



**T**HE LORD IS OUR GREAT CARETAKER. HE IS A GOOD GOD WHO LOVES TO TAKE GOOD CARE OF HIS CHILDREN.

I have five children that my wife and I take care of. They depend on us for sustenance and provision. If we fail to take care of them, legally we are deemed to be unfit parents and our children are removed from our care. What wondrous joy to receive a promise that God will always take care of us and that we will never be taken away from him!

The proverb writer, Agur, offers wise words concerning God's care for us as he makes appeals to his creator, "Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die; Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God" (30:7-9).

In a world that is never satisfied, Christians are called to be satisfied in Christ. Our prayer life should not be marked by asking God for more and more, but rather a holy dependence upon him. Agur asks for his needs to be met, for sure, but asks for nothing more than that; no excess. What a mature request!

My children always want more and more of anything they see as good. They want more and more candy, not realizing the belly ache that comes after their gluttony. As a good father, my job is to sustain them and even reward them, but not spoil them. I think if we take an honest look at God's provisions to us we would see that He is much closer to spoiling us than letting us go hungry. Our God is a great caretaker. Take time to show him you care today.



# AUGUST 23

## *Proverbs 31*



**A**N EXCELLENT WIFE WHO CAN FIND? SHE IS FAR MORE PRECIOUS THAN JEWELS” (10).

I have truly been blessed with an excellent wife, and I thank God for her everyday. She makes me a better man, husband, father, and pastor. She fulfills her Godly calling and puts others before herself.

My wife’s favorite verse of scripture is found in this passage about the virtuous wife. “She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet” (21). My wife loves winter weather. One of her favorite pastimes is being snowed in when the weather is too adverse for travel. She loves snow, so she loves this quality of the virtuous wife.

This fearlessness in the face of snow represents something more than just a love of snow. It shows the tenacity of a virtuous woman. Her family has nothing to fear because their needs are met by a prepared wife. Her family being clothed in scarlet shows that she has taken the necessary measures to make sure that her husband and children have the finest clothes needed during winter. In short, she takes care of her family.

“A woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (30). If you are a woman, strive to be a virtuous woman who exemplifies the characteristics of the Proverbs 31 woman. If you are a single man, seek out women like this. If you have a wife like this, thank God for her today and let her know she is loved. If you long for your wife to be like this, lovingly teach her the ways of the Lord.

Proverbs begins by exhorting young men to fear the Lord in the pursuit of wisdom, and ends by exhorting women to fear the Lord in pursuit of virtue. When we have reverent fear for our creator, we walk as wise children of God, and wisdom is our possession from him.

# AUGUST 24

## *Ecclesiastes 1-2*



**T**O SAY THAT THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES BEGINS IN A SOMBER TONE IS AN UNDERSTATEMENT.

Solomon has come to the daunting conclusion that all we do is in vain. All that is acquired, due to hard work, will be stolen by death. Solomon's accomplishment will die with him. He questions the point of living wisely. Do they not meet the same end as the foolish? Each generation continues to strive only to lose against time. The next generation will repeat the process only to greet the grave. St. Augustine said, "We all are on an unceasing march towards death."

So ask yourself, what were your grandparent's dreams? What were their greatest accomplishments? What about their parents? Your dreams, your goals, your accomplishments, even your name will be forgotten. There have been over 100 billion people to have lived on this earth yet in history we approximately 300. The chances that anyone will remember your is about nil. So what is the point? Does anything matter? Solomon is not a nihilist. But he begs the question, "If all will pass away, is not all in vain?"

If you find this depressing, then ask, what defines your worth? Depression can easily follow someone when they come to the conclusion that they changed the earth very little if at all, or that they will be forgotten. But if your self-worth is associated with Christ, then that changes everything. It brings purpose to your toil. It brings purpose to your laughter or to your tears. It puts wisdom in perspective. You matter, not because of your inventions or humanitarian efforts, but because you are an image bearer. You matter because you were written in the Lamb's book of life before the foundations of the earth to be a trophy of God's grace. You matter because the Lord your God has filled you with both purpose and meaning.

# AUGUST 25

## *Ecclesiastes 3*



**S**OLOMON SHOWS THAT THROUGH LIFE, WE SEE BOTH SIDES OF THE COIN.

Life and death, love and hate, or weeping and laughing will come to pass. Just as seasons come and go, so to will life experiences. Different seasons of life will produce different experiences. But Solomon quickly points out that both wickedness and righteousness exist under the sun and both will die. From the dust we were brought forth and to the dust we will return. What will we do with “the lot” which has been given to us for the moment in eternity that we are here? Solomon tell us that in our labor and in our experience we ought to rejoice in our work, that we ought to be joyful and “do good” as long we live. Is it cruel that God gave man work and passion in a world that will eventually end?

The fact is work is good. Work is not a burden, though it may often feel as if it is. You are permitted to work. I am not defining work as an 8 to 5 job but rather whatever you are producing with your life. I am talking about the fact that you are a missionary. You are in the ministry if you abide in Christ. You were sealed with the Holy Spirit, you were given gifts to edify the body. You were given a message of reconciliation to the world. You labor is for a purpose. It is to testify to both the grace and mercy of our Lord. It is to show the redemptive power of Christ to take a sinner to a saint.

You’re not too old to work for the kingdom of God; you’re not too young. You ought to be working with great joy, rejoicing that you can be a messenger of the gospel. Let me add a warning; what makes the action wicked or righteous is not the action itself, but the motive. Is your labor for Christ exalting? Does it seek to bring glory to God?

# AUGUST 26

## *Ecclesiastes 4*



**S**OLOMON DESCRIBES A SAD SIGHT BUT ONE WE KNOW ALL TO WELL.

A man who has forsaken community in pursuit of wealth. Their love is not for one another but for riches. What a trap this can become. We consume and gather, but Solomon ask, for who? If all we have is envy, and we seek to gather, what will we do with all that we have?

Solomon tells us that those who are in biblical community are blessed because it is the other person who can both hold you in a time of need, and be the object of your love (9). There is a love that ought to exist within biblical community. We should be there for each other, encouraging all to persevere in the faith. A Christ centered affection for one another brings warmth and comfort. Finally, we were not meant to be alone. We were made to have fellowship, but also protect each other from those who desire to lead the left hand from the right. If we are a body, should its parts not be unified? What does that look like when lived out?

Do you value community? Too often we use the words “church family,” but if we are honest, it is little like a family. In a family we know our mistakes, we know our failures, yet we love each other. We desire to be with our family. In our gatherings, the word acquaintances may be a better description of our relationships.

What is your relationship with those outside your local church? Are they not part of your family, too? Is it not the same Holy Spirit that indwells them? What can *you* do to improve that family? What can *you* do to love on those who are hurting? What can *you* do for those who are exalting Christ? The purpose of community is not *you* but *him* who granted us with adoption, so that we may build up and edify. It is loving and protecting the bride of Christ whom he spilled his blood.

# AUGUST 27

*Ecclesiastes 5:1-7*



**H**OW SHOULD OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD IMPACT THE WAY WE APPROACH HIM WITH WORDS?

Solomon offers very interesting thoughts on how we approach a holy and righteous God, whose words hold all creation together. We are called to watch our steps and tongue. Solomon tells us it's better to listen and not to be careless with our words. He paints a picture of God who is deserving respect and reverence.

Our words are a manifestation of our heart. The way we speak is reflective of how we feel. Your tone and speech changes when you are speaking to your wife, to your kids, to your boss, or to a police officer. How should our words in prayer be used? According to scripture, not flippantly.

When my daughter was born, my wife and I were determined that we would teach by showing genuine prayer. We did not want to teach approaching God with meaningless, repetitive, and empty prayers. Our words should reflect the intimate relationship we have with our Savior and Creator.

Have you ever tried to impress with a prayer? Do you find yourself saying the same old prayer or phrase over and over again without thought? To pray in Jesus' name should not simply be a comfortable closing. Fancy words should not be invoked to impress the masses. Genuine prayer is an outpouring of praise and thanksgiving to our Lord, humbled that he'd even hear our voice. Read the accounts of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John as they stood in the midst of God.

Remember that this is the God to whom you speak.

# AUGUST 28

*Ecclesiastes 5:8-20*



**S**OLOMON TELLS US AN INCREDIBLE TRUTH. ALL WHO HAVE WEALTH, POSSESSIONS, AND POWER ARE RECIPIENTS OF A GREAT BLESSING, SINCE IT WAS GOD WHO HAS GIVEN THESE THINGS INTO THEIR HANDS.

But why? Is money not evil? Solomon explains why God gives wealth and possessions to man, and its so beautifully simple. It is to “enjoy them” (18). The Lord has chosen to bless some with wealth, out of his grace, and through his desire to see them enjoy it. Like all things, which have been given to us by God for our benefit, we take a blessing and make it an idol. In verse 10, Solomon tells us that “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money.” The glutton of money cannot rest because he desires and loves that which is not fulfilling.

It is the love of money that is evil. It becomes difficult though to purge ourselves of such a sin. We hide our love of money behind righteous motives. I was complaining about churches wasting money, not giving enough to those in need, but was quickly convicted when I asked myself “What am I giving to the needy?”

Do you feel entitled because you give? Do you treat your tithe as a payment to a club? Do you give generously? Trust in the God’s provision. What you have was given to you by God for your enjoyment. I personally pray that I may receive enjoyment in giving and blessing others, so that my wealth can be a testimony of my trust in God’s provision and my love for the body.

# AUGUST 29

## *Ecclesiastes 8*



**I**N THE MIDST OF THE JUDGMENT OF EVIL, WE SEE GOD'S GRACE.

Solomon shares a common truth that we know all too well; the wicked will meet their end (10-13). However, God does not give us the immediate judgment we deserve. Solomon recognizes two important facts in light of, "The heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil" (11).

First, our inclination is to sin. Second, all men sin because of our natural inclination. Despite the evil that all men do, Solomon recognizes that all "will be well with those who fear God" (12)

Why is it that those who fear God will be saved from judgment? To fear God is to recognize your guilt and your due punishment. Yet, given that our hearts are fully set to do evil, we somehow recognize God's position above men. How is it that those who are fully evil can come to this holy understanding? It is by grace. What we see throughout scripture is that God gives faith, by his grace. God reveals to a fully wicked man the realization of his due punishment. Because of God's sovereign love, we are able to place our faith in Christ alone.

So we do not simply fear God as judge for our judgment has fallen on the shoulders of Jesus. Our fear is in awe of his power. It is what Isaiah saw which is why he crumbled declaring that he was a man of unclean lips. When you think about your sin, his judgment, his sovereignty, his holiness, are you not ashamed of your unfaithfulness? Are you on your face praising this God for forgiving you? If not, why not now?

# AUGUST 30

## *Ecclesiastes 11*



**S**OLOMON UNDERSTANDS THE MEANING OF DEATH. SOLOMON ALSO UNDERSTANDS THAT LIFE IS GOOD.

Life is what we were meant to have, and that prolonged life is a grace given by the Lord. He writes, “Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun” (7).

Death is terrifying. You were not made to die but to live. Though it is sin that grants you the inheritance of death. It is foreign to the soul. So for each second you breath, rejoice, for it is a breath you do not deserve.

Cherish your loved ones because they are given a life they do not deserve. Solomon speaks great wisdom when he tells us the person who lives a long life will see “days of darkness” but by the grace of God, these dark days end (8).

Sin brought death and despair. As we continue to live on this earth we will experience continual hardship because sinners are allowed, by grace, to continue to breathe. Death is a reminder of our sin, but according to scripture, a release from a sinful creation that produces suffering.

Pray and praise God for making death not the end, but the beginning to life eternal with him.



# AUGUST 31

## *Song of Solomon 1:1-7*



**W**E LOVE GOD BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US, WHEN WE WERE UNLOVABLE, AND COVERED IN FILTH.

Song of Solomon is a revelation of God's overwhelming love for his creation in a very personal way. We must see ourselves as the bride. In doing so we will be drawn into a more intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Song of Solomon begins with a kiss of affection. The kiss is intimate and genuine. As the bride prepares to be embraced by the king, she tells her beloved how unworthy she is. Her dark skin is a sign of her poverty, and the fact that she had to work. Her veiling may be a sign that she was either in mourning or had engaged in prostitution. The sins of the bride were known and she was unworthy of such a lot.

Can we relate to this bride in any way? Have we not whored after idols? Are we worthy to be the bride of Christ? How should a lowly unworthy bride present herself to her husband?

At times we forget our beginnings, our natural hatred toward the Lord. Our sin defined us only until the day where our king showed compassion. He grants us faith so that we may bow before the Lord. Are you an entitled bride or one who knows their place before God?

# SEPTEMBER 1

*Song of Solomon 1:8-2:7*



**I**T IS FASCINATING THAT GOD HIMSELF WOULD INSPIRE SUCH STRONG IMAGERY AND PASSION FOR US.

In these verses, we see a great deal of anticipation for each other's embrace. There is a build-up, a self control between the two, as they trade their affections and feelings for one another, and trade words of affections and gentle touches. The king takes this lowly woman and appreciates her beauty. The woman is "sick with love" and feels protected and safe as she walks beneath the banner of love.

Our relationship with the Lord is obviously not sexual in nature, but reflect on the great passion that both husband and wife feel on their wedding night. Do we have that kind of anticipation for Christ's return? It is easy to say intellectually we are anticipating, but feelings produce actions. Do your actions show your anticipation?

Furthermore, we see a king decorating and lavishing grace upon this lowly woman. Such an act ought to make us sick with love. When we see the great love of our Lord towards us as sinners, how can we not feel safe under his banner? How can we not anticipate and be full of excitement about his return?

# SEPTEMBER 2

## *Song of Solomon 2*



**T**HIS IS A WONDERFUL TESTAMENT, NOT JUST TO THE LOVE THAT SHOULD EXIST BETWEEN A HUSBAND AND A WIFE, BUT ALSO THE CHURCH AND CHRIST.

The bride anticipates her groom as he enters within his presence. She is taken by both his presence and beauty. The groom comes to her, and then he speaks to her with love and excitement. The groom introduces his bride to a place where there is no more rain, the winter is over, and the “time for singing has come” (12). There is a great anticipation and rejoicing between the two.

Song of Solomon is a beautiful account between two characters; the bride and the groom. Given that we are the bride of Christ, I have to ask myself, do I adore Christ in the way a bride adores a groom?

Now of course, for all men who are reading, it’s hard for us to identify with such feminine language. It’s hard to imagine ourselves as a bride. The sexual nature of a marriage speaks to an intimacy between the two. With the Lord, this is the level of intimacy we should want. You must adore your Savior, your Christ, your God.

Take time to write down or think aloud what adoration looks like. What should an adoration toward God look like? Where are you falling short?

# SEPTEMBER 3

## *Song of Solomon 3*



**T**HE GROOM ARRIVES. SOLOMON, TRAVELS TO THE BRIDE'S HOME AND SPARES NO EXPENSE.

We see perfume, men who are singing and dancing, and a carriage made of fine materials including silver and gold. He travels to her, removes her from the desert, and brings her to himself.

The picture for those in Israel, no doubt, is likened to God leading his people out of Egypt. God, over and over again, rescues his people from bondage. Leading his people out of Egypt foreshadows a greater liberation as the Lord's people would eventually be freed from the bondage of sin.

In your rescue, God spared no expense. Greater than gold or silver, Jesus' blood was spent for you and I. If God spared no expense to pay your debt, how should you respond? Is there something you are not willing to give up for God's glory? Where are you holding back? Think upon these things and repent.

# SEPTEMBER 4

## *Song of Solomon 4*



**C**HAPTER 4 SHOWS A GROOM WHO ADMIRES THE BEAUTY OF HIS BRIDE.

Though some of the compliments may seem strange, Solomon comparing his bride to those things that were costly, perfect, or beautiful in his day.

Solomon's love for his bride is strong, but being sinful, admiring the beauty of his bride fades as Solomon's unfaithfulness grows. This once pure and splendid excitement for his wife dissolves as he takes the bed with countless women.

Think back to when you first came to the Lord. Do you remember your initial passion? Do you remember the fire that was in your belly and how you desired the Lord above all else?

As we walk in the Lord, we meet those dark times, those times where our faithfulness is called into question. We can become jaded and ridged in serving the Lord. Our sin often increases as we our hearts become less pure. Yet, the Word of the Lord tells us that we will be presented blamelessly before God. Despite your continual sin, you are found beautiful before the Lord. He will always find your beautiful. He will not cast us out, along with our wicked hearts.

The Lord instead keeps you, remembering who you are in him. We are his. For those who are married, you should be the same way with our wives. Her beauty is how you should define beauty. The Father's faithfulness toward you should overflow into your marriage.

# SEPTEMBER 5

*Song of Solomon 6:2-7:10*



**R**EMEMBER, THE BRIDE IN THIS BOOK COMES FROM A PLACE OF POVERTY.

We have seen him decorate her with splendor and pour incredible love on her. Solomon has brought this bride into his courters, and has let her live among royalty.

In these verses, we see Solomon has 60 wives and 80 concubines. By the end of his life, he would have 700 wives and 300 concubines.

Before he turned his back on his “one and only,” he loved her above all. He took this unworthy bride and made her queen of queens. It was there she was exalted in her position to be above all wives, concubines, and virgins. Scripture says that the people would praise saying, “Who is this who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners” (6:10)!

The bride’s status among all in the kingdom came through her relationship with the king. All of those who abide in Christ will be exalted as co-heirs. We will be greater than conquerors, as we reign with Christ over a kingdom that is not ours. Our inheritance is far greater than anything we can imagine and infinitely more than we deserve.

Fall on your face, and think about how you will be exalted and presented blameless. It’s hard to imagine. It’s hard to fathom, given our sin. Who can ever question the mercy of God? As you pray, reflect on the nature of God and sing his praises.

# SEPTEMBER 6

*Song of Solomon 8:1-5*



**S**O OFTEN, OUR HEARTS ARE COLD BECAUSE THE GOSPEL HAS LOST ITS POWER.

In public, Jewish couples were not to express their marital love openly. The bride expresses her desire, not to treat her groom like a brother, but express to all her love for him. Her passion cannot be contained behind doors. She'd rather be condemned and despised rather than withhold her love for her king.

I think of what my home, my neighborhood, or my community would be like if my passion for the Lord was so strong. The lukewarm do not know the love of the Lord.

There are times in which we become less passionate and forget that we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit because of the works of Christ Jesus. It was love for us that kept Christ on the cross. The flood waters cannot quench the love of the Lord. The strength of his love is great and redemptive.

# SEPTEMBER 7

*Song of Solomon 8:6-7*



**T**HE BRIDE WANTS TO BE THE MOST VALUED POSSESSION IN HER GROOM'S LIFE, AND SHE WANTS HIM TO BE JEALOUS OVER HER.

Signet rings represented the king's signature. They were pressed onto wax in order to seal, secure, and authenticate a document. The bride asks the king that he hold her in high esteem and seal their love upon his arm and heart. This implied that she belongs only to him.

We are loved, pursued, and are of great value to the king. When we realize that, we find our security and identity in Christ.

Harry Ironside, a Bible teacher of old, asked a man in his church to share his testimony. The man told about Christ's sovereign call on his life, how God had pursued him, and focused on how God did all the work. After he finished, one concerned church member said, "You have shared a great testimony, but you forgot to tell about the role you played in it." The man smiled and answered, "Oh. I'm sorry; my part was running away and God's part was running after me until he caught me."

God's love is an eternal, lasting love that cannot be quenched and cannot be bought at any price. While we were yet sinners, he ran after us. Thank him for this today. Pray this affection for sinners will move us to show compassion to others as God demonstrated compassion to us through the cross and resurrection.



# SEPTEMBER 8

## *Isaiah 1*



**W**HEN ISRAEL WAS AT HER LOWEST MOMENT, SHE DID NOT EVEN REALIZE THE DESPERATION THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN HER CRY.

Time and time again, God had called out for repentance and restoration in the deepest places of her heart. The kings had been warned, but to no avail, the hammer had been lifted to strike the cold, hard, calloused hearts of the leaders, but also of the people.

On one hand, I have often wondered what I would have done as a Jew in an anti-covenant world. Rules are rigid. Rules can limit. But rules are for the good of the people. Idol worship had become the practice of the day and the norm for the Jewish people, practically to the point of polytheistic suicide. Would I have fallen into the trap of idol worship? Do I do so now in the post-Christian world in which I live, work, and exist?

On the other hand, I wonder what I would have done if God had tasked me with the job given to Isaiah. For approximately fifty years, this incredible man named Isaiah gave his all to the truth of the Word, and eventually died preaching it faithfully. As a pastor, I frequently evaluate the ministry God has granted me, and I am consistently brought back to the question, “Do I have any idols in my life?”. That inquiry tends to haunt me, especially when God says in Isaiah 1, “Wash yourselves. Cleanse yourselves. Remove your evil deeds from My sight.”

Take some time today to evaluate your daily walk with him. He is a trustworthy God, and has nothing but compassion for you as one of his children. The challenge? Don’t let the idols of this world rule your life, nor strip you from an incredible walk with the God of the universe.

# SEPTEMBER 9

## *Isaiah 3-4*



**C**ONTINUOUS SIN LEADS TO HAUGHTINESS, PRIDE, AND EVENTUALLY TO OPEN REBELLION.

No one is immune to that progression. If a man or woman gets away with any type of sin in their life for too long, they tend to think that they are invincible. Israel had become that way, from the spiritual leaders, to the men of each tribe, and eventually to each clan, and family. Sin is like a cancer that eventually attacks one like a snake hiding in the brush by the tree stump. Bam! A strike on the heel!

The women of Israel had followed their husbands, began to flaunt their sin, but sin will eventually found them, and won. Isaiah warned the daughters of Zion that on that day, “the Lord will strip their finery” (3:18). When I consider the principles of this verse, I can’t help but look at those in America who think they could get by with misappropriation, extra marital affairs, or even murder. Eventually, even the world looks down on what would be called the big sins. Depravity is universal, and sin consistently wins if not brought down to its proper place.

Fortunately, God is merciful even during the most devastating consequences of sin. Dealing with Israel, God granted them hope amid their haughtiness. God spoke through Isaiah, “On that day the branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious” (4:2). This truth must be our daily thought. To honor God is not a one-time event, rather a continual, daily practice. God promised to provide for those who would not be massacred in the exile, and did just that.

Before you fall into the trap of haughtiness, examine yourself as to whether that is a common problem in your life. When that happens, God will give you a “refuge and shelter from the storm and rain.”

# SEPTEMBER 10

## *Isaiah 6*



**I**SAIAH WAS A MAN, A HUMAN BEING, WITH SINS THAT NEEDED CLEANSING.

Isaiah 6 is an interesting story of a man whom Christians seem to revere from the depths of our souls. What was it that Isaiah had done that would warrant this extravagant picture of cleansing? Was it his thought life, his attitude, his unbelief? The point is this – it doesn't matter. What we sometimes forget is that we need that ultimate daily cleansing so that we can hear God's voice, follow his direction, and fulfill his will for his glory alone.

Admitting our sin is the hardest part of repentance. When was the last time that you were brought to your knees by your own sin, and not pointing at others for their wrongs? I tend to wonder if Isaiah was so used to pointing out the failures of Israel that he forgot to examine his own life? It tends to make us feel good when we pick out someone with sins that seem worse than our own. Our standard is God himself, his character, and his attributes. When Isaiah realized that he was standing before the only God worthy of being worshiped, his countenance and attitude completely changed. The Scripture does not say that he fell to his knees, but I tend to believe that was his posture when he humbly stated, "Woe is me, for I am ruined (undone), for I am a man of unclean lips."

Whenever God chooses to reveal himself to us in this way, there is no other posture, no other words to say, and no excuses for our sin, but only humility! Pride does not exist in the presence of God. I met an angry man one time that said, "When I finally meet this God of whom you speak, I have a thing or two to tell him." My friend, when we meet God, Christian or non-believer, the only response that we will experience will be one of humility and awe.

# SEPTEMBER 11

## *Isaiah 9*



**I**SRRAEL WAS IN THE VERY MIDDLE OF THEIR DEEPEST AND DARKEST PIT IN THEIR HISTORY.

God had spoken and judgment was well on its way. The northern-most tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali had been humbled and effected by paganism the most, and its reach was now on its way to Jerusalem. Amid this raging storm, God still speaks. Many a Christian has studied this passage; yet, we have had the blessing of theologians explain this verse in ways that Israel did not. We are blessed to see through the lens of the New Testament Christ and can see who the “light” is through the life of Christ. So often we take this fact for granted.

Have you even been in a place in your life that seemed so dark through which you could not break out? A place that seemed to own your soul? This place is not uncommon for many people to experience, but there is one spiritual darkness that you cannot break out on your own – a heart without Christ. This promise in Isaiah 9:6 is our hope and our answer to every problem. The light to whom Isaiah was referring is the same God-man who said “I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows Me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Jesus claimed to be that light.

What if God had not sent the message to Isaiah in the way that he did? What if Jesus had not come the way God had promised 700 years before his birth? What if the message of the light had not come to you at that darkest time of need in your life? It is humbling to think of how God promised how the “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” would come to us in the darkest time of our lives.

# SEPTEMBER 12

*Isaiah 14*



**W**HEN I WAS A YOUNG BOY, MY FRIENDS AND I WOULD PLAY A GAME CALLED KING OF THE HILL.

All we needed was a dirt or grassy mound, and a handful of bodies. The bodies did not have to be the same size, shape, or weight. The result was to knock each other off the mound until everyone gave up, except for the one! After many sprained joints, and bloody noses, it was rare the same person was victorious. The King of the Hill retained that title until the next time. Wow, how times have changed since the introduction of technology and video games!

The King of Babylon had the same idea. He desired the lofty idea that he could reign over all kings of the world, including the God of the universe. This thought may seem like a grand idea to some, but in the long run, God always wins. In this passage, the King of Babylon is compared to Satan by many a theologian. It also has birthed what is known as the five “I will” statements. The king arrogantly states, I will ascend to, I will set up, I will sit on, I will ascend above, and I will make myself. Does this sound familiar to many in our society, or our culture?

The result of the king’s pride was ruin, because God says no way! You will be “brought down to Sheol into the deepest regions of the pit.” Instead of victory over all kings, including God, the king (Satan) was sent to the furthest deep of hell. His pride backfired on him because he did not acknowledge God for who he was.

What is it in which desire to be king over? Is that desire from God, or from your own selfish ambitions? Even though Sheol is not our finally resting place, check your motives, seek after righteousness, so that making God your king will be your final goal!

# SEPTEMBER 13

*Isaiah 17*



**I**N THIS AGE OF SELFISHNESS, I CONTINUE TO BE AMAZED AT THE LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE END TIMES.

The world looks at what they have attained, and what is coming tomorrow as their security and support. I remember as a young man how much I looked forward to the things that I could accomplish, obtain, and accomplish. These thoughts within the right context are not evil, but they can easily turn into the same idols that the world craved in 700 BC. Eventually, God judged all the nations that surrounded Israel, and they did not even see it coming. Assyria, Babylon, Moab, Damascus, Cush, Egypt, as well as Israel all felt the blow of God's hammer coming down on them full force.

Directly in the middle of the judgment oracles in chapter 17, God continues to reveal his love to Israel as he did before they began to fall away. A matter of fact, God never stopped loving them, though they might have felt that way through judgment and destruction. Israel would not admit their sin.

My father was a strict disciplinarian, but the one thing that I remember about his parenting is that he would always make sure he loved on me after I was scolded. That balanced action spoke volumes to me as I have tried to practice that same method with my own children. That has paid off because my children know that I love them – no matter what the situation.

Verses 7-8 are instrumental in the life of Israel. "On that day people will look to their Maker and will turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel. They will not look to the altars they made with their hands or to the Asherahs and incense altars they made with their fingers." Look to your maker for comfort because eventually the end will come.

# SEPTEMBER 14

## *Isaiah 22*



**G**OD PUTS PEOPLE WHERE THEY NEED TO BE AND THE EXACT TIME THEY NEED TO BE THERE.

I started seminary when I first became a student pastor in the late 1980's. It was a humbling, yet exciting time for me. I did not know how hard it was going to be, nor did I realize the financial strain it would put on my pocketbook. One day, a letter came in the mail from a group in South Carolina which stated that I had been awarded a scholarship and that my tuition was paid for that academic year! What a blessing that God had given me! I did not understand why I had received the scholarship, but gladly accepted the free gift. About a week later, I received another letter in the mail with a sincere apology attached to it. I had been mistakenly sent the scholarship in the place of a person with the same name and middle initial! I had quickly been stripped of the award I didn't earn.

God is extremely good at what he does. A steward named Shebna is mentioned in this chapter of Isaiah. The intensity of God's words should get our undivided attention. "I will remove you from your office; you will be ousted from your position." These are the last words that anyone wants to hear from their boss, much less the Lord. God takes humility seriously, and according to theologians, Shebna was all about himself as he was caught carving "out a tomb for yourself." That does not seem like such a terrible sin, but the fact remains that he cared more about himself and his position than he did the protection of Jerusalem.

Be careful not to see yourself as irreplaceable. God knows your heart, and will remove you from where you are if need be. How do I know? Personal experience. Sometimes it is necessary for the Kingdom and your own personal growth.

# SEPTEMBER 15

*Isaiah 26*



**T**HOUGH MUCH OF THIS PLAN IS A MYSTERY, WE MUST TRUST OUR GOD TO GET IN THE LAST WORD.

My brother was a very interesting character growing up, and there were so many things that I wanted to replicate from him. But he had a problem with always wanting to get in the last word. Why? I never figured that one out, so I was baffled by this urge to be heard. After a heated argument with my father one night, my dad said, “Son, not another word!” My brother could not help but respond calmly, “Word.” Needless to say, that was not a shining moment for him!

There is only one who ultimately has the final say in all things – God. He created the universe, he sustains it, and will bring it in with a eschatological crash!

Once judgment comes, there is not much for anyone to say. The judgment of God is righteous and swift, yet no one desires to see it come upon America, or ourselves. The good news is that once judgment comes, there is peace and rest. Israel saw the judgment of God first hand, endured it, and then there was peace. Only God can ultimately bring peace as he says in verse 3, “You will keep in perfect peace the mind that is dependent on You.” Those who trust the Lord do not need to get in the last word, because they trust that God will do accomplish that in their stead.

Do you always have to be right? Do you have to get in the last word, or have a better story than the next person? Being right does not make you righteous. Being obedient brings righteousness through Christ’s finished work on the cross. Seems as though all of us need to consider who speaks for us when we open our mouths.



# SEPTEMBER 16

## *Isaiah 30*



**G**OD HAD PROMISED KINDNESS TO ISRAEL, AND NOW IT WAS NOW IN THEIR GRASP.

Teachers have tremendous influence. Even in this day of rebelliousness, a teacher can say something that makes the eyes of the student open wide. My son is a sharp young man, but he does not seem to think that my suggestions are very good. There was a period that we were having trouble landing on the same page of a certain subject. I finally let it go because we could not come to an agreement. Well, enters the youth pastor. Praise the Lord! After a Wednesday night teaching with this certain pastor, my son comes to me and says, “Dad, you know what Pastor Joe said?” He commences to repeat the same exact words that I had been trying to express for weeks! I was thankful for the affirmation, but it completely depends on the vantage point of the TEACHER!

In Isaiah 30, the mercy and compassion of God is poured out on the remnant of Israel. God had promised to bring them through the destruction of Jerusalem, and now he promises that “he will show favor to you at the sound of your cry: when he hears, he will answer you.” God had always been faithful and now “the LORD is waiting to show you mercy.” When God is trying to teach us a lesson, it may not happen the way or the time in which we expect. God then refers himself as the “Teacher” in verses 20-21, and when revealed as this title, their eyes saw him as just that.

God can become many things to us, even things that may not be true. Do you need to see him as the teacher today, revealing truths to you that could change your complete outlook on life and maybe even your ministry and family? Jesus was often called Rabbi or teacher in the New Testament. Call on his name for wisdom today.

# SEPTEMBER 17

*Isaiah 32*



**D**ISHONESTY IS NOT A NEW TRICK. SATAN HAS BEEN USING THIS TECHNIQUE FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS.

I first got interested in the presidential process in 7th Grade, circa 1974. I had philosophically voted for Richard Nixon, whom my parents had voted for in November 1971. As a young man, I had this undying belief that the office of the President of the United States was one of integrity and honesty. My belief system was crushed when I saw the news that year when Watergate was revealed to the public, and President Nixon shamefully resigned his position. My thoughts about the highest position in the land and politicians was never the same.

In Isaiah 32, God reveals a truth to man that many of us cannot wait to experience. First, he says that “a king will reign righteously.” Pardon me. Can it be true that the world will have a king that is honest, true, and full of integrity? As it has already been revealed in chapter 9, we can trust that Jesus alone will fill this righteous reign!

On top of that truth, “rulers will rule justly” and “a fool will no longer be called a noble.” God’s plan may be slow coming in many ways, but his timing is perfect. One day, Christ will rule with truth, and those who serve under him will lead with righteousness and fairness. No longer will we have to watch the mud-slinging advertisements or wonder if a politician is telling the truth or a lie. One day the earth will be brought back to its original perfection, untainted by sin.

“Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war” (Revelation 19:11). Be ready and look for the one who will wipe away all sin and injustice. Oh what a day that will be!

# SEPTEMBER 18

## *Isaiah 36-37*



**I**F THERE IS ONE THING THAT I HAVE LEARNED IN MY SHORT LIFE, DIFFICULT TIMES WILL COME. NOT IF, BUT WHEN.

No one is completely immune to sickness, family struggles, or financial hurdles. About five years ago, I had come into some very dark, overwhelming times. Chronic sickness in the family, a financial monsoon, and an extended family divorce that rocked our world. I longed to trust God, and was willing to do so. After a few months of seeking God, I had come to a place that did not seem to have a favorable ending. I was now at the bottom looking up, and then I read Isaiah 36-37 as I was preparing for a Bible study.

Hezekiah had come to the end of his rope. Sennacherib was breathing down his neck, the armies of Assyria were smelling blood, and Judah had nowhere to turn, except to look up. Sometimes God allows these types of struggles so that we understand he is all we need, all we have, and all that is necessary for victory.

Hezekiah, therefore, took the letter he had received from Sennacherib and “went to the LORD’s house and spread it out before the LORD.” Hezekiah’s prayer to our God is in verses 16-20, and is such a prayer of faith and trust when there is nowhere else to go. Read for yourself that prayer and the end of the story as Hezekiah is victorious without raising one sword or shield. God has a way of doing these types of miracles when we surrender to him.

The rest of the story? I did this very thing, and without giving details, I experienced God’s hand of victory over numerous hurdles. Today trust in our God as the king did in 37:20, “Now LORD our God, save us from his hand so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD – You alone.” Amen.

# SEPTEMBER 19

*Isaiah 40*



**N**OTHING COMPARES TO WATCHING UP CLOSE THE FLIGHT OF A BALD EAGLE.

The bald eagle is an amazing, powerful bird of prey. I had the privilege of spending a few days in the beautiful state of Alaska. As we were on a tour, bald eagles were everywhere. It was almost like God gave them that state as their own little country. From that experience, I gained a renewed appreciation for their beauty, strength, and grace in flight.

Strength is sometimes captured by the picture of an animal or a mountain. Isaiah said that Yahweh is the hope that we have in the lowest point of our own strength. He asked the question earlier in the chapter, “Who will you compare God with?” When a believer is looking for help, renewal, or spiritual energy, one must look to God alone for that response. God then takes what he never lacks, strength and energy, and gives freely to those who are in need. That is why Isaiah writes, “he gives strength to the weary, and strengthens the powerless...they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint.”

I have met many a believer who is done with ministry. I have never understood that action, nor have I figured out how to help those in which come to that crossroad. Jesus never quit, backed down, or gave up. He continued to walk that road to salvation for us, even in his final hours, to show us the truth of which Isaiah was referring.

In the book, “The Prayers of Peter Marshall,” one prayer says, “We remember all too well the bitter discoveries we have made when we tried to run our lives our own way, when we steer our own craft. Wilt Thou come aboard, Lord Jesus, and set us a true course, for we grow weary of life’s demands, tired of our own blundering ways.” Amen.

# SEPTEMBER 20

*Isaiah 43*



**R**ESTORATION IS A TERM THAT MUST HAVE A PAST ATTACHED TO THE RECIPIENT.

If something or someone is going to be restored, there was already a past life or image created. God connected Israel to her past by reminding the people that he had “created” and “formed” them from the beginning. If this is true, the restoration was going to come from the original creator, in this case, Yahweh.

He not only created Israel, and every individual person who was connected to that nation, but also *redeemed* them. God claimed them as his own and took on the responsibility of redeeming them as his own family. No other nation could claim this achievement through the God of the universe. God chose them, without merit, to represent him as his ambassadors on the earth. He, therefore, longed to restore them after the exile was completed.

During that exile, God also promised protection. In verse 2, God states “when you pass through the waters” and “when you walk through the fire.” It is most certainly not if, but when we will hit the turbulence of life. Remember in those times, God has already redeemed you through the finished work of Christ on the cross, and he promised protection to those who claim him as Savior.

When sickness, stress, or even death may come upon you or your family, do not fret, rather trust. God is that immutable God, who cannot lie, is on the throne always ready to restore you.

“Look, I am about to do something new; even now it is coming. Do you not see it? Indeed, I will make a way in the wilderness, rivers in the desert” (19).

# SEPTEMBER 21

*Isaiah 46*



## **I**SRRAEL SEEMED TO HAVE A NATIONAL IDENTITY CRISIS.

I had a friend in high school who did everything well. He was the valedictorian, an athlete, good with his hands, and seemed to handle stress very well. He went on to be a very successful manager in a large company. I was quite envious of him for many years, and often wished that I could be like him. Without an understanding of who one is in Christ, all of us would be in the same boat. The day that I realized that God made me for a specific purpose, and I was secure in God's salvation, I no longer longed to be like my friend.

Though God had called Israel to be different than all the nations that surrounded them, they still longed to be just like them, even when it came to whom they worshiped. God had revealed himself numerous times, and in different ways over the centuries, but that was not enough.

In his book "Gods at War," Kyle Idleman states, "God declines to sit atop an organizational flowchart. His is the organization. He is not interested in being president of the board. He is the board. And life doesn't work until everyone else sitting around the table in the boardroom of our heart is fired." To affirm this truth, the Lord resounds, "Bel crouches; Nebo cowers. Their idols are consigned to beasts and cattle." The truth is that no other god even exists except in the heart of man!

Take a moment and evaluate the gods that may have evolved in your life. Confess that idolatry, and remember that God has a plan for your good today. "I am God, and no one is like Me. I declared from the beginning to the end, ... My plan will take place, and I will do all My will" (9-10).

# SEPTEMBER 22

## *Isaiah 50*



**T**HIS CHAPTER CONTINUES A THEME OF THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF CHRIST.

The servant is an amazing picture of humility, compassion, and patience with those by whom he is persecuted. The key to this incredible servant is the instruction he has digested in his life. The driving element of discipline determines his motives, and his tongue (4). I can just imagine our beautiful, bloody Savior hanging on the cross, tempted to spew hatred and cursing, but all the disciplined Jesus can do is speak words of forgiveness.

He also knows “how to sustain the weary with a word.” Those who are connected to him or have followed him through his ministry have only heard words of encouragement, and filled with compassion for those for whom he came to die. Oh, it gets better. One of the reasons he is disciplined is his obedience to spending time with God as “he awakens Me each morning.” The ability to spend time with God’s instruction is one thing, but to allow God to have “opened My ear” is a clear picture of willingness to learn.

Two things should catch the eye of the believer in this verse. First, do you possess a spiritual awareness so deep and cohesive that nothing keeps you from your daily walk with the Father? Second, does that practice of discipline raise your level of compassion and mercy to love even those who persecute you? The Savior had every earthly right to cast each protester into a burning hell.

Take a moment today to evaluate your quantity and quality time with your God today. What is it that bids me away from the precious moments I spend with him. What is it my life that does not match with the Bible intake level in my life?

# SEPTEMBER 23

## *Isaiah 53*



**I**AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD. THE GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP" (JOHN 10:11).

The picture of the shepherd gives comfort and peace to the believer when things are not going well. Why? Because the shepherd is always in control and knows what to do during turmoil and danger. In one of my favorite 1990's movies, "Babe," the sheepdog is speaking to the herd of sheep, but they are having trouble communicating. Then the narrator calmly states, "Fly (the sheepdog) decided to speak very slowly, for it was a hard-cold fact of nature that sheep were stupid, and there was nothing that could convince them otherwise."

Verse 6 is a critical, and theological central turning point in the history of Israel. They were highly educated in the ways of the Torah; growing up every day with the Scripture ingrained in their minds. How could this be? Who was this suffering servant who is taking this punishment, and why? The answer is in the heart of the people. First, "We are all like sheep; we all have turned to our own way." If not for the shepherd, who is also the servant, the sheep would still be wandering somewhere in the desert with no guide or protector. Secondly, without the shepherd who seeks them out, the sheep have no ability to seek out safety on their own. The shepherd is so committed to find the sheep that he is willing to die in the process. This deed is exactly what Christ accomplished on the cross at Calvary.

Take a step back into the past to revisit the place that Christ came and found you. There is nothing that you could do, or have done since then to merit his gift of salvation. Be thankful that the Good Shepherd was willing to seek out a dumb sheep like you!



# SEPTEMBER 24

*Isaiah 56*



**I**NCLUSIVENESS SOUNDS LIKE A GREAT IDEA WHEN IT COMES TO SALVATION, BUT IT DOES NOT WORK VERY WELL.

The term breeds liberalism and a misunderstanding of what it means to be brought into the family of God. We all love to be part of something, especially when it involves one's eternal destiny. One of the most popular bumper stickers is the COEXIST theme that seems to be the rave in our society. What the global religious community does not understand is that inclusivism tells a lost person that they can continue to live without Christ here on earth, and in eternity, you are on your own merit.

On the other hand, God does have a spirit of inclusivism because he loves all people and people groups. This spirit was huge part of the big picture of his plan throughout the Old Testament. He does not long to judge, but rather to love and distribute salvation to whom all who believe. Verses 3-8 are a beautiful picture of God's heart for non-Jewish people, "and all foreigners who convert to the LORD ... I will bring them to My holy mountain ... for My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." God's entire plan was laid out for the Jews for hundreds of years, but they missed it when Christ came on the scene. He even quoted Isaiah 59:7 when he ran the money changers out of the temple. Even then, they did not see the salvation and kingdom that Christ was ushering into history.

Thank God for your own salvation. How often do you take for granted what God has given you through the Savior? Also, take time to pray for those whom you know are lost in your workplace, your communities, and even your extended family. God desires for all of them, the entire population of planet earth, to turn to him!

# SEPTEMBER 25

## *Isaiah 61*



**A** 1980'S HIT MOVIE AND SERIES, "THE HIGHLANDER," MADE QUITE A RUN IN THE SCI-FI ENTERTAINMENT WORLD.

The storyline was that of a man who was an immortal, but did not know this fact until he was killed and surprisingly came back to life. Later he finds out that within this species of immortals only a single person could be the immortal. Therefore, if another arrived on the scene (I don't know how that came about), there would be a fight to the death. At the end of the ruckus, the Highlander would always state, "There can only be one."

From a theological standpoint, the Highlander was right, but it was definitely *not* him. It was, it is, and will always be Jesus the Christ. In his book "New Testament Theology," Dr. Frank Stagg claims, "The New Testament clearly represents Jesus struggling with the question of his own identity and mission." Please hear this: If Jesus struggled with who he was, then mankind is big trouble. Jesus took time revealing himself as the Messiah, but that was only because it was not time yet.

In Isaiah 61, part of the work of the Messiah was revealed. After "the Spirit of the LORD GOD" is laid upon him, he would "bring good news to the poor," "heal the brokenhearted," and give "freedom to the captives." After Jesus had been baptized, and the "Holy Spirit descended on him" (Luke 3:22), on a common day in the Temple, Jesus was asked to preach and give commentary on this very passage. His only annotation to the people was "Today as you have listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled" (Luke 4:21).

When it comes to being the Messiah, there can only be One!

# SEPTEMBER 26

*Isaiah 64*



**W**HEN READING PROPHETIC LITERATURE, REMEMBER THAT IN MANY CASES, THESE EVENTS ARE WRITTEN AS A FORTHTELLING OF GOD'S WORD.

The other side of that coin teaches that sometimes the event has already happened, but can also apply to a future event. In this chapter, a forthtelling is the approach that should be taken. It is written as a past event, but the sack of Jerusalem has not yet come. In retrospect, Israel is now calling upon God and asking him to respond to them in their period of disgrace and devastation. It takes this sacking to finally get their attention, and for brokenness to drive their need for God to rescue them.

Why should it take such an event to stir repentance in the life of God's people? Why must one wait until it is almost too late to respond to God's compassionate plea? The good news is that God never gets tired of calling out to the prodigal, the lost, or the ignorant. Israel finally response through Isaiah in verse 8, "Yet LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay and You are our potter; we all are the work of your hands." Everyone who comes to God in repentance will need to come in that same humbled attitude. When that finally happens, then God has the freedom to shape, form, twist, and smooth those parts that most need the change he desires in us.

Just as the prodigal son in Luke 15, sometimes we end up desiring to eat of the pigs' food because we traveled such a dark spiritual path of life. Stop now, and pray that God would help you as the old hymn says, "Thou art the potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after thy will, while I am waiting, yielded and still."

# SEPTEMBER 27

*Isaiah 66*



**I**T IS INTERESTING THAT HUMAN BEINGS ARE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR THE NEXT GREAT THING, ACTIVITY, OR CHAMPIONSHIP.

In 1996, the University of Kentucky finally won a NCAA Championship in basketball after an 18-year drought. After a night of celebration and burning cars (I don't get that), the next morning a fan called into the local sports station. After only a minute or two of conversation, one could tell that the man was distraught over the fact that they were going to lose almost their entire to graduation or the draft. In an upset, frantic voice, that young man said, "What are we going to do?" Instead of just enjoying the first championship in almost two decades, the poor fella was discontent about next year.

One day, this will not be the case. Isaiah clarifies in verse 22 that God himself will create a "new heavens and the new earth." This act is the pinnacle of the Old and New Covenants – to make restore everything as it was originally made. Perfect. This is the reason why man is always looking for something else to fulfill their empty hearts, because the world is broken and man is depraved. Isaiah understood this principle and cast that picture through the 66 books that God have put down through his pin. One day, all the championships, endorsements, paychecks, and bank accounts will be burned up in the fury of God that is coming.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away . . . he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will exist no longer; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away" (Revelation 21:1-3).

# SEPTEMBER 28

## *Jeremiah 1:1-3*



**W**E LEARN QUITE A BIT ABOUT JEREMIAH IN THESE FIRST FEW VERSES OF HIS BOOK.

He was born to a family of priests in Anathoth, a small village near Jerusalem. He probably descended from a priest King Solomon banished to Anathoth for supporting a rival for the throne (1 Kings 2:26). His prophetic ministry spanned about forty years—he spent his life serving God.

Jeremiah was a Hebrew prophet (that is, one who spoke the word of God) to the people and to the Hebrew kings. He represented God faithfully. He often told the kings many things that they didn't want to hear, angering them. In other words, he risked his life to serve God. Sometimes they listened, sometimes they didn't. How can we listen for God's voice in our lives? How willing are we to serve and obey God, even if it is uncomfortable, inconvenient or even threatening? During tough times, are we more or less likely to listen to and heed God's direction? Can you speak God's truth even when, at the least, your image might be at risk? Who do you know of who has done just that? Do you admire them for it?

These verses name the three principal kings of Jeremiah's time. In total, the prophet spoke the word of the Lord during the reigns of five kings. Who has been or is influential in your life? How hard would it be to "speak your truth" to the powerful people you know? How good are you at receiving it if other people speak their truth to you? Jeremiah's heritage (a priestly family that stood apart from the ruling monarchy) seems to have shaped his ministry. He spoke with firm integrity, unmoved by what Judah's rulers wished he would say. In what ways have your family history and life experiences shaped you? How might God use your unique qualities and experiences?

# SEPTEMBER 29

*Jeremiah 1:4-18*



**G**OD CALLED JEREMIAH AND GAVE HIM A GIFT TO SPEAK GOD'S WORD EFFECTIVELY. HE TOLD HIM TO GO OUT AND USE HIS GIFT IN SERVICE WITHOUT FEAR.

What gifts has God given you? Have you found a way to use your gifts effectively in service to God? Have you ever been afraid to use God's gifts? Jeremiah thought he had flaws that would prevent his being able to serve, but God assured him that he would overcome his flaws. Do you have flaws you think might disqualify you for God's service? What would God say to you about these perceived flaws? How could God use you in spite of or because of these flaws or failures?

Jeremiah, like many others God called, thought himself an unlikely candidate for God's work. He was young, maybe younger than King Josiah (who was only 21 when God called Jeremiah to prophesy). He said he did not know how to speak. God could see what Jeremiah couldn't. God called him a "fortified city," an "iron pillar," and said, "Do not be afraid of them." God told Jeremiah he was born to be a prophet (5), and promised to be with him (8,18).

Though God at times works through our weaknesses, most often he uses our strengths. What are you good at? What do you find joy in doing? How can you let God to shape who you are and what you do to spread the message of God's love? Jeremiah thought he couldn't possibly be God's prophet. He wasn't alone. Moses had a speech impediment. Rahab, who helped the Israelites defeat Jericho, was a prostitute. Mary, Jesus' mother, was a young peasant girl. What flaws in yourself do you think hinder you from God's service? Ask God to show you who you are in his sight.

# SEPTEMBER 30

*Jeremiah 3:12-4:4*



**J**EREMIAH MIXED IMAGES OF GOD AS A SCORNE  
HUSBAND AND PARENT TO CALL TO JUDAH.

Commentator John Guest notes, “The divorce laws [of Jeremiah’s day] said there was no second chance. Yet God’s love transcends our frailties and offers us a new marriage with him.” We can “see” Jeremiah pleading, “‘Return!’ [says God]. ‘How gladly I would treat you like my children.’”

Jeremiah echoed God’s message to Moses, “The LORD ... the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished” (Exodus 34:6-7). How have you experienced God’s grace and compassion, God’s eagerness to forgive and welcome you back when you miss the mark?

Twice in these verses Jeremiah repeated God’s call to his wayward people to “return.” God was not calling them, and does not call us, to abstract ethics, rigid rules to obey “or else.” God called them, and us, to a relationship, a decision to walk daily with God. If Israel would return to this relationship, God said, he would provide the spiritual healing they needed.

What differences do you see between calling people to “return to correct doctrine” or “return to good actions” and the call God in fact sent through Jeremiah: “return to me” (4:1)? To what extent has God become a personal presence in your life, rather than just an idea?

What things today are like the deceptive “idolatrous commotion on the hills” in Jeremiah’s time? When have you let something go in order to return to God? What did it take to show you that you needed to change course?

# OCTOBER 1

*Jeremiah 4:6-14*



**T**HE BABYLONIANS WERE ALREADY ON THE MARCH TOWARD JUDAH, BUT GOD DOES NOT GIVE UP.

At the end of the reading, God declares, “Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart and be saved.” In what ways does this scripture speak to our lives? In what way can we do what God asked of the Hebrews? How do you believe God measures and responds to our faithfulness?

God never gives up. It’s harder to see in the English Bible, but Jeremiah was a gifted Hebrew poet. He used a series of vivid poetic images in chapter 4 to warn Israel of the looming danger the nation faced. The Babylonian lion was out of his lair; his chariots were coming like a whirlwind. But those grim images were not a simple forecast; they were the backdrop for an appeal. The prophet and poet ended with “Wash the evil from your heart and be saved.” “Wash the evil from your heart” might sound as if we just need to think differently. The UBS Translator’s Handbook on Jeremiah notes that the Hebrew phrase is about how our inner thoughts shape our way of life. “Translators can say ‘clean all the evil from your lives’ or ‘make your hearts [or, lives] clean; remove all the evil.’” How are you, day by day, giving God access to your thoughts, so that through them God can best work to reshape your way of life?

We live in tumultuous times and difficult days. Many scholars have said that we now call right what has always been called wrong and we call wrong what we have always called right. It is incredibly easy to compromise and listen to the world. Do these things characterize your life? Facing the temptations of our world demands that we avoid evil and seek after God’s holiness.



# OCTOBER 2

*Jeremiah 5:1-31*



**J**EREMIAH WARNED THAT JUDAH'S TURNING FROM GOD MEANT THEY COULDN'T DEPEND ON GOD'S PROTECTION FROM THE BABYLONIANS.

When Jeremiah delivered stinging messages like this, people did not just say, "He's a prophet —it must be true." Verse 31 notes that there were many "prophets" in Jerusalem, and most of them said Jeremiah was wrong. This posed, and poses, an important question: how do we discern God's authentic voice, and decide how to respond to it?

Jeremiah sharply rebuked Judah for following other gods, and for failing to defend "the just case of the poor." Do you see any linkage between the two issues? Your choice of "gods" shapes the values by which you live your life? To what extent did Jesus follow Jeremiah's path in ministry? In what ways did Jesus do things differently? In what ways should you do things differently so that you might impact your world positively with the gospel?

His message was not what they wanted to hear. How open are you to honestly identifying and facing areas in which your values and actions are different from God's?

Most people, it seems, did not believe Jeremiah when he spoke. Many only recognized him as a true prophet after his dire messages came to pass. How do you determine whether you are hearing God's voice through others? When you hear these messages, do you always believe and accept them? The people didn't want to hear what Jeremiah was preaching. Therefore, they rejected his words. Can you face it when you realize your values or actions are different than God's will for your life? What causes you to veer into wrong thinking and acting? What can bring you back to God's will?

# OCTOBER 3

*Jeremiah 8:18-9:1*



**D**O YOU BELIEVE THERE ARE WAYS IN WHICH THE WORLD OF 2017 IS SICK AND SUFFERING?

Jeremiah agonizes over the suffering that the people must endure because they have turned away from God. He wishes that some medicinal balm might be applied to the land so they might be healed of their wrongdoing. What kind of balm might help? In what ways does the spiritual situation today resemble that of the “promised land” in Jeremiah’s day? In what ways does it differ?

In their Old Testament survey, the scholars LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush wrote, “Jeremiah’s agony mirrors the agony of Yahweh at his rejection by Judah.” Neither Jeremiah nor God wanted to see Babylon crush Judah. Even the strongest words of judgment came from a heart that wept over Israel’s stubborn refusal to repent.

In Romans 9:2-3, Paul spoke like Jeremiah: “I have great sorrow ... in my heart ... I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people ... the people of Israel.” How did Jeremiah and Paul develop God’s compassion toward those who opposed them, rather than scorn or hatred? How can you grow more like them?

We live in a world that is very lost. The number of those who do not know Christ continues to grow. In America, 20% of adults attend church on a given Sunday. Baptisms continue to drop. Pray that God will help you to love people outside of Christ the way that Paul and Jeremiah did.

Gilead was famous for plants that were made into medicinal salves and balms (Genesis 37:25). Hence Jeremiah’s expression “balm in Gilead.” In what ways has God’s presence been a healing balm in your life? In what areas do you wish for God’s healing touch?

# OCTOBER 4

*Jeremiah 18:1-12*



**T**HE POTTER SAW THAT HIS CREATION WAS DEEPLY FLAWED, SO HE DESTROYED IT AND REMADE IT.

The pot was inanimate, so it could not fix itself, and was of “no use.” But people can change. Even though God has declared that destruction was coming to Israel, He still was giving people a chance to repent. The sad part of Jeremiah’s commentary was this observation. A close link existed between chapter 17 and chapters 18–20. Destruction was in view (chapter 17), but repentance can yet prevent that fact (18:7-8). Repentance, though, was not present (18:12), so Jeremiah’s shattered flask illustrated God’s dashing Israel in judgment. Can you think of a time when you knew you were doing something God did not want and you paid a price for it? Is it ever too late for a person to change his or her life?

Jeremiah’s visit to the potter’s house led him to teach the principle scholars call “conditional prophecy.” Biblical prophecy is more than “fore-telling;” two-thirds of biblical prophecy involves “forth-telling,” setting the truth, justice, mercy, and righteousness of God against the backdrop of every form of denial of the same. To speak prophetically was to speak boldly against every form of moral, ethical, political, economic, and religious evil. When Jeremiah spoke prophetically, he gave Israel a condition by which they could avoid God’s judgment. The prophecy was not a hopeless pronouncement.

There are times when we think we are in a hopeless situation. Remember, God’s desire is for you to know and to experience him. If you are away from God, repent, and return. The word through Jeremiah gives each of us hope. Is there something in your life right now that seems hopeless? How do you need to respond to God through it?

# OCTOBER 5

*Jeremiah 20:1-13*



**W**E SEE HOW REALLY PAINFUL IT WAS FOR JEREMIAH TO BE A PROPHET.

Jesus never said being a disciple would be easy. What if times change and being a Christian means real suffering for you, or your family. Would you be prepared to be derided? Beaten? Poor? Hungry? Have you ever asked God about this? Should you? If you face difficulties in serving God, can you face them squarely and talk about them with God? Who else could you share your troubles with? How would a group like this one fit in your answer?

God told Jeremiah he would make him like an iron pillar (1:18). Unlike an iron pillar, the prophet was still human, and had emotions. He did not like being hated; he did not like prophesying destruction. But he could not stop preaching God's message (9). So he trusted God to be with him as he carried out his heartbreaking ministry.

God never promised his followers an easy ride through life. Few of us face the extreme physical threats Jeremiah (and many others, including Jesus) faced. But Jeremiah's story can lead us all to ask: what is my faith worth? Rejection? Poverty? Physical danger? Have you worked through good answers to this question with God yet? And has it led you to submit fully to God's will for your life?

Too often, we believe we should act as though nothing bothers us when we face tough times. Jeremiah, like the psalmists, penned several "laments" like this one. In what ways do you express pain or sadness? Are you able to share those concerns honestly with God? Is there someone in your life with who you can trust to share your feeling?

As we deal with the terrible circumstances facing our state and nation, take time to pray for God's sustaining power in your life to stand for what is right.

# OCTOBER 6

*Jeremiah 23:1-8*



**E**VEN IN THESE TOUGHEST OF TIMES IN JUDAH, GOD, THROUGH JEREMIAH, HELD OUT HOPE FOR HIS PEOPLE.

It was not for every individual Hebrew, but for the Jews as a whole. When you go through the darkest of times, can you see any light at the end of the tunnel? Do you pray? Does God offer any solace or hope? What are the hardest things you are facing right now? What about people you know? How can you, as an individual and as a group, be hands of hope and solace for those who suffer?

Things were bad in Jeremiah's Judah. The leaders were letting their people, and God, down. This reference was to the false leaders, kings, prophets, and priests who failed in overseeing and assuring the people's welfare. Jeremiah 23:5, however, was a wonderful promise of the coming Good Shepherd Who would bring hope and healing to the nation and to the world.

Jeremiah felt compelled to speak starkly about the wrongs he saw around him. But his vision did not get stuck solely on the flaws he saw in the present. God had a better future in store. Like all of the Biblical prophets, Jeremiah lived in the hope and trust that God would send a redeemer to set all things right (6).

It can be hard to hold onto hope in tough times. It's difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel when you're in exile (or unemployed, have lost someone close or been hurt by a loved one). What is the hardest thing you face right now? How have you learned to draw on God's power, and the caring of others, to help you face fear and loss? In what ways do you build your faith that, in God's world, the future always holds hope?

# OCTOBER 7

*Jeremiah 26:1-13*



**T**O AVOID THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM, GOD CALLS THE PEOPLE TO ONCE AGAIN ENTER INTO A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM AND FOLLOW HIS LAWS.

Do you believe that, if the people had obeyed and returned to God, the Babylonian invasion or the destruction of Jerusalem would not have happened? Do you believe God's protection operated differently in Jeremiah's day, with Israel embodying God's purposes in a specific nation, than it does today with God's people drawn from every nation, kindred, tribe and tongue? Will God protect the so-called Christian world under all circumstances? Did God protect Jesus, or the Apostle Paul? In what ways do you believe you can depend on God to protect you and your family?

Jeremiah used a key idea twice in this temple sermon: "The Lord will relent." At another spot in the book (which, remember, is intended to read more as a collection not as merely a chronology), God says, "I have spoken and will not relent" (Jeremiah 4:28). But in the temple, Jeremiah said, "If you change your behavior, God will relent and spare you from disaster."

In Jonah, God sent another prophet to preach disaster. The hearers repented and God relented. Jonah was furious, "Isn't this what I said, LORD? I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God ... who relents from sending disaster" (Jonah 4:2). Was Jeremiah right? Could Israel have avoided exile by turning back to God?

At one time, God's tabernacle was in Shiloh (Joshua 18:1). By Jeremiah's day, Shiloh lay in ruins (Jeremiah 7:12-15). Think of the text in this way and ask this question. God has blessed our nation and our churches in the past. Does that mean God must protect us today, whatever our spiritual condition?

# OCTOBER 8

*Jeremiah 27:12-22*



**N**EBUCHADNEZZAR RULED WITH AN IRON FIST. YOU COULD COMPARE HIM TO SADDAM HUSSEIN OR FIDEL CASTRO.

But God rules kings and kingdoms and counts Nebuchadnezzar as one of his servants, one of his instruments of accomplishing his will on earth. Everything God does is significant.

He stands as a warning against the pride and arrogance we have in western culture. And a warning about success: perhaps your job is going well, or your kids are doing well in school, or your ministry is taking off. Humble yourself before him. God ultimately humbles and humiliates Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar himself says later on, “I praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (Daniel 4:37).

Not only is God ruler of kings and kingdoms, he never forgets his children. The people of Judah are ready to take on the Babylonians in chapter 27 of Jeremiah. Jeremiah begs them to bow and serve the king of Babylon - surrender to exile or perish are their only options. The problem: they have thrown off the yoke of obedience to God. Breaking away from obedience to God never brings freedom but instead slavery to some task master and oppression. What they can't see in their disobedience is God's promise to come back for his people. He kept that promise. The sufferings of God's people will not last forever.

Father, we confess that you alone are God. Your purposes are good. You rule over all things. We praise you for that. We desire to come under your easy yoke.

# OCTOBER 9

*Jeremiah 28:1-4*



**Y**OU'VE SEEN IT. A MILLION TIMES PROBABLY. A FOOTBALL PLAYER WITH IT IN THEIR EYE BLACK. TWO WRESTLERS ABOUT TO WRESTLE - BOTH WITH IT TATTOOED TO THEIR BACKS.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

I remember thinking as a kid, let's see how this goes - Jesus vs. Jesus in the ring together. With the strength of the Lord, I can score a touchdown and make all of my free throws with this abused and kicked around verse.

It's cool to cite Scripture. We just don't hold tightly to its authority when it doesn't suit us. We prefer "feel good" over truth most of the time. This isn't a new problem. It's a beginning-of-time problem.

In Jeremiah 28, Hananiah tells the people of Judah that the threat from the Babylonians is ending. He says that God is going to break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar and everything will be back to normal soon. This would have been great if it had been accurate. But it wasn't. Hananiah simply knew what the people wanted to hear.

We do the exact same. We prefer what sounds good in the moment and finding our own desires in Scripture rather than discovering what the Lord says. Behind every piece of God's Word is the person who reigns over everything. Jesus - crucified, dead, buried, and risen - is seated on a throne and reigning over us today. The Bible is where he speaks. How we read it is most certainly a lordship issue in our lives. Jesus is Lord, not you or me.



# OCTOBER 10

*Jeremiah 29:4-7*



**L**ET'S LIVE SO THAT THE NATIVES WILL WANT TO MEET OUR KING." -JOHN PIPER

In Jeremiah 29, God gives a clear command to seek the welfare of where God has placed us. We live in a "Babylonian" world as strangers and exiles in a land that's not our home (1 Peter 2:11). We have been "transferred out of the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13). We need to do all of the things that God commands his exiles: build houses, plant gardens, have families. And do so for the Lord (Colossians 3:23).

Live in a way that makes the people of West Virginia see that you serve someone much greater than anything we can find here on earth. You are here intentionally. You are part of a community with vulnerable people who need your love and service.

Pray to the Lord on behalf of West Virginia. Earnestly seek him on behalf of your community. Ask for good things. Ask for a heart for the vulnerable. God is not indifferent to the welfare of West Virginia. These verses show us that he cares about the day-to-day wellbeing of our communities. Show are cities, towns, and hollers the "city that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14) and call them to it.

"What if we measured success in simple, faithful acts of obedience - acts of love, acts of grace, acts of mercy?" -Mason Ballard

# OCTOBER 11

*Jeremiah 29:10-13*



**C**HRISt DIED IN OUR PLACE, SO WE CAN'T BE SEPARATED FROM HIM. HE CAN'T LEAVE US BECAUSE HE CAN'T LEAVE HIMSELF.

Jeremiah's role, by this point, is to bring God's Word to the Jews in exile which includes 10,000 of the most capable Jews (including Ezekiel and Daniel). He's warned them that they'll be in Babylon for seventy years. As we saw yesterday, the Lord has told them to settle down, seek the welfare of Babylon, and now ... a promise. A promise to not leave them or forget them. If they will seek the welfare of the city they're in, they will find their own welfare.

Then, he promises that after the seventy years are up, the Jewish people will remember him, they will seek him, and when they call upon his name and pray to him, they will be heard. Things may be bad for now, but God will restore his people to health and punish the nations and people who have exploited them.

Read that last verse again: "... with all your heart" (13). That's sobering for me. God didn't want half-hearted obedience. And he doesn't now. He wants and requires all of us, just as he gave everything for us. "If we are faithless, he remains faithful -- for he cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).

Thank God, today, for his faithfulness. When we're faithless, like exiles in Babylon, he is still faithful. He took our punishment and shame and made them his own.

# OCTOBER 12

*Jeremiah 31:31-34*



**O**UR SIN. IT'S A PRETTY SIGNIFICANT OBSTACLE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. IT COMPLETELY SEPARATES US FROM HIM.

How can a holy God meet us with so much kindness as to give us his own Son? The new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31 was a permanent and intimate new reality to come.

So in order to bridge the divide between our sin and his righteousness, God put our sins on Christ. Then he judged them there so that he “remember them no more” allowing him to be both merciful and just at the same time. Christ took our judgment - our sins are gone.

Now! Now, there is no more separation. God is free to pour on the new covenant. Instead of living up to the law, he writes it on our hearts so that we are free to love Christ and follow him with joy. “I have not come to abolish the law but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17).

I don't know about you, but I have to remind myself daily of this covenant relationship. I *was* bad and sinful, I *am* still unworthy today, but he is good *forever*.

Take some time to remember today. Enjoy the who the Lord is to you, confess where you have been disobedient, and thank him for his never-ending love.

# OCTOBER 13

*Jeremiah 32:36-41*



**I** WILL MAKE WITH THEM AN EVERLASTING COVENANT THAT I WILL NOT TURN AWAY FROM DOING GOOD TO THEM ... I WILL REJOICE IN DOING GOOD TO THEM” (40-41).

What could be more encouraging than today’s reading? Our joy is what really makes God happy. “The infinite heart of God is engaged in doing us infinite good. And that is what Jesus paid for with his blood” (John Piper).

Last year our family faced quite a bit of discouragement. Illness and loneliness brought feelings of defeat and inadequacy. Physical exhaustion put me at the end of my rope some days after dealing with emotions and decisions that needed to be made.

Sometimes our circumstances are so difficult, we just can’t find joy. “In hope [Abraham] believed against hope” (Romans 4:18). Believe in the promises of God even when it’s difficult. God won’t turn away from you and he’ll be faithful to take your little piece of hope and turn it back into joy. He will not turn away from your good. Never!

This relationship we have with God is a two way street. While he seeks our good, he’s also seeking our praise. When we delight in him, our praises overflow. Delight in him today. “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!” (Psalm 115:1).

# OCTOBER 14

*Jeremiah 33:3a*



**H**AVE YOU LEARNED HOW TO BELIEVE GOD'S PROMISES? AS A CHRISTIAN, YOU BELIEVE IN CHRIST FOR YOUR SALVATION, BUT HAVE YOU COME TO A PLACE WHERE YOUR FAITH BELIEVES THE MOUNTAIN OF ALL THE PROMISES GOD HAS GIVEN US THROUGH SCRIPTURE?

"Call unto me, and I will answer you ..." (3a). This is a big verse with a big promise. Jesus told his disciples that whatever you desire, when you pray, believe and you'll receive (John 14:13-14). Let's say you pray for something but don't really believe that he will give it to you but you get it anyway. That's a gift from God. But it's not an answer to your prayer. Your prayers are answered in proportion to your faith. If you believe and ask for something that is for your good and God's glory, you will have it. "The promise is a promise and God is God" (Charles Spurgeon). When there is faith, there is an answer to prayer. It's true in my life and I've never heard any other Christ follower deny it either.

Spurgeon shares a Christmas story as a model for our prayers: It used to be custom for the poor inhabitants in a village to go around with bowls to the rich people in their community and beg for bread and other provisions. The rule was that every gentleman was to fill the bowl that was brought to his door. The wisest of the poor brought very large bowls for the Christmas gathering, but those who had little faith in the generosity of their wealthy neighbors took a small bowl. The small bowls and the large bowls were both filled to the brim. So, we must always bring a big bowl to God. Bring great faith and rest assured that God will act accordingly.

# OCTOBER 15

*Jeremiah 33:3b*



**W**E DON'T KNOW EVERYTHING AND WE CAN'T PRETEND TO BE FULL OF ALL KNOWLEDGE.

Yesterday, we looked at the first half of this verse with a big promise about coming to God in faith-filled prayer. Now, we come to the second part of verse 33: "... and [I] will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."

We all know "that" guy who is never wrong, at least not in their own mind. He's the guy who disagrees with everything you say because he knows better, of course. In any game, he's the coach, player, and umpire. And above all, he hates other know-it-alls because two know-it-alls will never agree.

When I graduated high school, I was sure there was very little I would learn in college. I thought I had life pretty well figured out and college was just a necessary evil to all I wanted to accomplish. By the end of my four years, the one thing I was most sure of was how little I actually knew. I discovered my own ignorance and my mind was open to how much more there was to know about everything!

As children of God, we can't be know-it-alls. Paul showed us this humility, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (Philippians 3:12).

The Bible is our standard of faith, and in it, we discover that our own views can be quite narrow. Approach Scripture with the prayer: "Lord, show me the great and hidden things that I have not known."

Pray to the most high God to prosper the preaching of the gospel in West Virginia, and that he will show us great and mighty things that we can't imagine for our state.

# OCTOBER 16

*Jeremiah 46:20*



**J**EREMIAH USED SWEET VERSES ROTTEN FRUIT, BROKEN POTTERY, AND HE LITERALLY WORE A YOKE AROUND FOR MONTHS.

Jeremiah is full of very clear illustrations to make sure the messages are fully understood. I don't know anyone in rural America who wouldn't understand the illustration, "Egypt is a beautiful heifer, but a biting fly from the north has come upon her" (46:20).

Most often, it's not the large things we need to worry about in our lives, but all of the small things that can overwhelm us. I get most stressed when the small tasks start piling up on my desk rather than just one big assignment.

One of cattle's most irritating enemies is the gadfly. A small, nuisance that can ultimately cause a bacteria that leads to infection that left untreated could kill the cow. The warning to Egypt is that while they're not looking, an army of gadflies is coming to defeat it.

Take a look at the details of your life so they don't overtake you in the future. Instead of sweeping small sins and issues under the rug, address them before they become one huge obstacle.

Father, we desire for our main focus to be sharing who you are and what you've done for us with the people of West Virginia. Protect us from the small things that can get in the way from living the lives you have called us to.

# OCTOBER 17

## *Jeremiah 52*



**T**HE BIBLE IS THE STORY OF GOD PURSUING PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN RUNNING FROM HIM AND RUINING THEIR LIVES IN THE PROCESS.

Jeremiah is yet another example of God's people running in the opposite direction.

Jeremiah was a preacher who they still wouldn't listen to. He probably felt alone most of the time. But if he had tried to quit, he couldn't. The word of God burned in him, and he had to speak whether or not he wanted to. He was a courageous hero who lived in the final days of a crumbling nation.

Jeremiah's ministry covered around forty years, and he never once saw a sign of success in his ministry. He didn't have a popular message - it was one of reform - and the people never listened or obeyed him. He seemed to be called to a ministry of failure, yet he was faithful to God and accomplished what God's purpose was for him (to witness the decaying nation).

Sometimes we're called to act and obey with no promise of success. Sometimes we're called to follow where the Lord calls you even when it's hard and when there are no guarantees of easy circumstances. Our family has been there. We've had long seasons of wondering if the Lord forgot us. Was God ever going clear the path for us? Was he going to show us that the difficulties we were having were worth it?

Don't be discouraged. Don't throw in the towel. Find encouragement and grace for today in Jeremiah's legacy and ministry. Let his courage to swim upstream inspire you to do the same.



# OCTOBER 18

*Lamentations 3:22-23*



**H**AVE YOU EVER BEEN REALLY HUNGRY? NOT LIKE SORT OF HUNGRY, BUT REALLY HUNGRY?

Have you ever been really hungry, craving a specific food, and you got that food? What an amazing thing that is! You feel like you can eat and eat and eat and never get full, right? I've had that happen, and I always become disappointed because there is never enough to satisfy me in the end, and I always leave craving more.

While our food may run out at a meal, Lamentations 3:22-23 talks about something that never will ever run out: the steadfast love and mercy of the Lord.

Praise God! This is what we need. While we may think we need our favorite food when we are hungry, we could really eat anything at that moment. But we need God's love and mercy. We need it desperately. Our sin separates us from God, and only through the love and mercy through Jesus can we know God. Guess what? That love and mercy never runs out! Even on our worst days, when people have failed us, when we have failed others, and when we have failed God, the love and mercy of the Lord is like a never ending waterfall of grace on our lives.

So for today, lean into that love. Take hold of it. Rest in it. The Lord loves those who are his in Christ, and if you are in Christ, the love and mercy of God is never ending on you.

# OCTOBER 19

## *Ezekiel 1*



**E**ZEKIEL IS VERY DETAILED TO WHAT HE SEES AND EXPERIENCES AS GOD'S GLORY IS REVEALED.

The reader sees creatures with four wings and four faces - creatures hard to describe (8-11). There is an atmosphere described that seems endless and majestic. A crystal like expanse surrounds him. He also describes lightening, a giant wheel, darting flames, and a throne room that was above stood all. For Ezekiel, it must have been hard to craft such an image.

Notice that all these things, as magnificent as they may be, did not cause the writer to worship. These images were made to display the glory of God but only until Ezekiel sees the Lord himself does he fall on his face (28). His response is not unique. All who see God in his glory respond this way in true worship. Creation, though a testament to God's glory (Psalm 19:1), does not in and of itself cause worship. When confronted with his holiness, all Ezekiel can do is lay down. God speaks and Ezekiel listens. Seeing and hearing God fuels the actions of Ezekiel. Seeing God's glory and hearing his voice, in turn, fuels a life of worship. Ezekiel's commission and mission, therefore, began when God confronted the prophet where he was, revealing both God's holiness and Ezekiel's sin.

The church has experienced and seen God's glory, but not as Ezekiel did. Rather, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we know both our depravity and God's holiness. If this is true, why is it that we often fail to submit our lives fully to the Lord? We cling onto those things we love, whether idols or traditions. Are you laying down your life in front of a holy and righteous God? Is your life a sacrifice that stinks in the nostrils of God?

# OCTOBER 20

## *Ezekiel 2*



**W**HEN GOD SPEAKS TO EZEKIEL, HE ALSO GRANTS HIM A CALLING. EZEKIEL IS COMMISSIONED TO SHARE AND TEACH THE WORD OF GOD.

God even tells him what to expect - a rebellious people (7). It is clear that whether they listen or not, Ezekiel is to be faithful. Their hearts desire something other than God. Despite being constant vessels of God's grace, they have turned their hearts towards idols (8:1-18), and these men are whoring after idols (6:9; 23:30). This strong imagery describes Israel as a faithless bride (16), yet knowing their reaction, God still sends a messenger. The main point is this: Ezekiel is not charged with changing their hearts, but delivering a message that can save them from self-destruction.

If one abides in Christ, God calls you a Saint (Jude 1:3). Therefore, you are commissioned to go and make disciples while sharing the good news. You cannot change the hearts of men but allow God, through his Word, to break their hearts and bend their knees. Teach repentance, not behavior modification. Recognize their sin, God's holiness, and responding in a way that becomes worship (Romans 12:1-2).

This is God's message; you and Ezekiel are simple messengers! It is not up to you whether this message is to be delivered, for obedience is demanded from your king. Who are you to deny a message of reconciliation? You have seen and tasted his mercy. Therefore, you know your sin. In light of that truth, how can you deny the Lord what he has commissioned you to do? Are you embracing your calling and your testimony?

# OCTOBER 21

## *Ezekiel 3*



**E**ZEKIEL IS CHARGED TO BE A WATCHMAN (16-27). SUCH A TASK REQUIRES EZEKIEL TO BE HONEST ABOUT THE DESTRUCTION OF THOSE IN REBELLION TOWARDS GOD.

Ezekiel must confront those who await death due to wickedness, and warn the righteous living in sin. To offer such a warning, God shows Israel tremendous patience and grace to those in that cesspool of sin. Ezekiel, despite his heart, can neither stop the upcoming judgment, nor can he save their lives. He is simply a truth teller. If Ezekiel remains silent, he would be committing gross negligence that moves God to warn him of the blood left on his hands (20-21).

Many believers consider themselves faithful watchman. I can't help but think of Paul in Acts as he proclaims that he would experience hell if redemption would be given to his fellow countrymen (Romans 9:3). The watchman is willing to lay down his life for those whom he is called to love. In this case, the watchman both guards God's bride, his children, but most importantly, God's truth. By guarding God's truth, the watchman protects the flock from that which can destroy the soul. There is the difference between a guardian who protects truth, and God's people and a spectator who offers nothing in return, except maybe criticism.

Which are you? Are you a guardian whose life is worthy of the gospel, or the spectator who launches criticism against the body of Christ? The spectator makes their preferences to the gospel, but do not see where God is working because they have failed to make truth their aim. Do you guard truth or tradition? Be a watchman who fights for the love of God and for the love of a brother.

# OCTOBER 22

## *Ezekiel 7*



**G**OD PROMISED JUDGMENT ON THOSE WHO HAD MOCKED AND BROKEN THE COVENANT.

He promised Ezekiel that Israel would die by the sword, starve, and be scattered throughout (5:12). God was jealous for his bride, and his judgment was going to make clear to Israel that they had offended the Lord. The purpose of God's wrath was to show both his hatred of sin, and also to break the will of those who oppose him.

Ezekiel sees God's sovereignty in several ways. First, God makes it clear that it was he who gave them an abundance of food and wealth (10-11). Second, their safety existed because he willed it. The reader sees both God using nature and nations to punish Israel's wickedness. As God displays his power and unlimited control of the Earth, and both man and beast cannot escape his will. The Lord raises up kings to do his bidding, and to bring about what he desires. In the book of Ezekiel, God's sovereignty is on display as he knows from the beginning the actions of his people.

Recognizing God's sovereignty is key to both a healthy life and ministry. A man once told me, "Do not ask God what his plan is for my life, but rather how I use my life for God's plan?" We can fall prey to make the focus on us rather than on God. In the day of Ezekiel, countless turned to idols for answers, or give them comfort when God seemed absent. Remember, you were made for his glory, and to testify to both his grace and transformative power.

God's plan is that you praise and serve him here and now. Look around and ask, where can I make great the name of Jesus today? Do you trust his sovereign hand? How could this type of trust manifest itself?

# OCTOBER 23

## *Ezekiel 22*



**E**ZEKIEL'S WIFE DIES, AND HE FORESEES HIS FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, AND CULTURE WILL ALL LAY IN RUINS (EZEKIEL 22:1-31; 24:15-25).

What allows Ezekiel to persevere in his future and his ministry? God speaks to Ezekiel about the coming judgment but ensures him that a remnant will remain. The Lord speaks of the hatred that will exist for him as Ezekiel preaches the Word of God and makes known their sin. The task is not for the faint of heart. For this reason, God promises that he will embolden Ezekiel and give him strength for the coming task (3:8-9).

A believer's salvation and strength rest in the hands of the Lord. Without him we cannot and will not persevere. The Lord also tells Ezekiel that he will extend grace to some and allow them to live (6:8). Our ability to persevere in the faith is completely dependent on the one who granted faith to begin with (Romans 15:5).

No doubt each of us will experience hurt, betrayal, and great loss. We will see sin's impact on the lives around us. By God's grace we persevere. Understand today, that each day you remain in the faith, it is because God has sealed you with his spirit. It is by his doing that you are faithful. It speaks to God's mercy and goodness. Do you give the Lord credit for your perseverance?

# OCTOBER 24

## *Ezekiel 34*



**D**ESPITE THE UNFAITHFULNESS OF ISRAEL, GOD STILL REMAINED FAITHFUL.

At this time in history, Israel had abused the temple to worship idols, and offered their children as sacrifices to their false gods. The anger of the Lord burns against those who had broken his covenant. This covenant was divinely imposed by God to Israel for their good and his glory. The Lord chose them to be his people, and he was to be their God. The problem was that their depravity and denial of God's holiness brought wrath upon them. The Lord promised to bring a covenant of peace (25), and to create a covenant that brings rebellious people back into the fold. This act, therefore, showed the merciful nature of the Lord.

God has also created a covenant with his Church. Like the covenants before, it is a covenant of grace. The covenant that Ezekiel knew was a covenant in which God chose an unworthy people to be his mouthpiece. The law was perfect, but due to man's depravity, it was also a noose. One can look back on this covenant and realize that God came to man on his terms. He made a covenant with man, but knew it would be broken. He then would be left to fulfill it.

The new covenant works the same way. God reconciled us through the death and resurrection of Jesus (I Corinthians 5:21). Unlike the law, God grants faith to all of those trust in Jesus as Lord. Through this act, there is peace between man and creator. God pursues, God promises, and then he ensures the completion of that promise. What other god, knowing your sin and depravity would seek to exalt you? Such a covenant speaks of a love that is indescribable. Thank and praise God that despite your unfaithfulness, he remains.

# OCTOBER 25

## *Ezekiel 43*



**W**E HAVE SEEN WHAT EZEKIEL COULD ONLY IMAGINE. GOD CAME, DEFEATED DEATH, AND NOW INDWELLS IN HIS BRIDE.

There is a great moment of sadness when Ezekiel is shown that God will depart from the temple and the city leaving the people of Israel alone (10:18). They feel abandoned, and God's judgment is closing in on them, as the Babylonians come closer to attacking.

In the end of the book, the Lord reveals that his departure is not forever, that the temple will lay in destruction, but will be rebuilt one day. The sacrifices will return, the priests will be active, but best of all, the Lord will once again dwell in his temple and live among his people. Praise the Lord, all is not lost for Israel. It is made clear to Ezekiel that God's punishment has an end and it is for the purpose of restoration.

There will be no need of further sacrifice. God will not dwell in a temple made by human hands, but in a body crafted and designed by the Lord himself (Acts 7:48; 1 Corinthians 3:16).

We still await Christ's return, but not for simply to have fellowship with God. Our relationship is already a completed task of Christ. Do you long for his return? What does a life eager for Christ's return look like? How does his imminent return change the way you approach the lost? Take some time right now to evaluate your thoughts towards a risen savior.



# OCTOBER 26

## *Daniel 1*



**T**HE PERSPECTIVE OF DANIEL PROVES HIS OPTIMISM IN THE MIDST OF TURMOIL.

The book of Daniel was written while Judah was held captive by the Babylonians. Daniel and three of his peers had been brought up as Chaldeans for service in the Babylonian court, and forced to keep a Babylonian's dwelling, diet, dialect, and designation. Daniel, however, desired to not be defiled with the king's food or wine, so other provisions were secured. With these provisions, Daniel was able to keep the Hebrew traditions, all the while finding favor of King Nebuchadnezzar.

As Christians, we are on earth for only a short season - our lives are but a vapor. Regardless, our lives may seem lengthy in comparison to other things that come and go. God, however, has foreordained a plan and purpose for our lives, and created us for good works in which we should walk (Colossians 2:10). Although we are captive to a world of sin and depravity, God says, "be holy as I am holy" (Matthew 8:48). He has set us apart to fulfill the purpose of his will. While we are in captivity in this flesh, we must seek after the desires of God. Jesus told us to deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow him (Luke 9:23). Even though Daniel denied himself the diet of a king, he was healthier than his peers. If we deny ourselves the temporary pleasures of this world, we will be found healthier here and in the world to come.

Is there something you desire, but gets in the way of serving Christ? Is your sin keeping you from fulfilling the desires of God? Today, discover how you have allowed your captor's desires to overcome God's desire. As you make these discoveries, deny yourself those provisions rely solely upon the provisions from God.

# OCTOBER 27

## *Daniel 2*



**W**E SEE THAT AN OPPORTUNITY ARISES FOR JEHOVAH TO MAKE HIMSELF KNOWN TO THE KING OF BABYLON.

Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that baffled him, and was extremely disturbed by its possible meaning. He then appointed a seemingly impossible task to the wise people of Babylon, and was angrily disappointed when they could not produce any results. When the decree went out to murder all of the wise men of Babylon, Daniel and his companions prayed to God for mercy. In his providence, God then brought about an opportunity for Daniel to approach the king with the solution to this impossible feat. Just any Old Testament prophet, death was the penalty for an incorrect rendering of what Nebuchadnezzar dreamed, therefore, Daniel was bound to rely on God for the results.

Daniel not only told the king about the dream he had, but through the power of Yahweh, he was able to also interpret the dream for king Nebuchadnezzar. This amazing feat of prophecy saved Daniel's life.

Faith comes in many different forms. Regardless, there will come a time when God will make it obvious you need to take a leap of faith. Why do we worry when God wants us to complete seemingly impossible tasks? Is our confidence in the wrong place?

Today, whether it's in the mundane or the miraculous, pray to God for his mercy upon you in every task you seek to complete. The Scriptures tell us to acknowledge God in all of our ways, and he will make our paths straight (Proverbs 4:11-12). If you truly want to ensure that his will takes precedence above your own, trust him for confidence and praise him for completion.

# OCTOBER 28

## *Daniel 3*



### **K**ING NEBUCHADNEZZAR FALLS OFF THE WAGON.

Although Daniel had previously performed a great sign and Jehovah was made known to Nebuchadnezzar, the king had not yet surrendered his whole heart to God. A giant statue was erected that the many of the Jews refused to worship, and the king was angered.

The fiery furnace is one of those stories, when learned as a child, that one remembers for a lifetime. As one might recall, unrighteous judgment was passed up on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and death by furnace was the penalty. Yahweh, however, preserved his saints as he sends a “fourth man” into the fire to prove his power.

It’s inevitable that you will see the presence and penalty of sin around you each day. The less people rely on God, the more stock they put into themselves. When this thought occurs, people attempt to become their own judges and juries - speculating about what is morally right and wrong. One can see this happening today in politics and press, as well as parishes and pulpits. One is quick to point the finger at others who are guilty of this action, but fail to examine themselves.

Today, purge yourself of pride. Consider the pitfalls in which you exert your power and pass judgment without consulting the righteous will of God. Are you attempting to take God’s righteous place as judge and ruler? Don’t judge in a way that fulfills your desire, but seek the heart of God. The Scriptures say to seek the kingdom of God first, and your needs will be met (Matthew 6:33). Remember that godliness with contentment is great gain, so keep these things in mind as you lead your sheep.

# OCTOBER 29

## *Daniel 4*



**G**OD HUMBLER NEBUCHADNEZZAR IN ORDER THAT HE WOULD LIVE A LIFE OF PRAISE TO GOD.

When Nebuchadnezzar praised himself, “Is this not Babylon the Great that I have built by my vast power ...” (30), it was at that very moment that God showed his power over kings. The result? “He was driven away from his people. He ate grass like cattle ... his hair grew like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws” (33). What a strange way to be humbled. Some commentaries say that he literally lost his mind.

There is proof in this passage that God had ultimate control. He promised to humble the proud and exalt the humble (Proverbs 3:34). Since Nebuchadnezzar exalted himself, God saw fit to humble him. Not only does our pride put us at risk for this judgment, but the pride of those around us makes this judgment imminent. It is not your job to humble the proud. It is your job to humble yourself before God.

In what ways are you seeking your own exaltation? Mark 10:45 says, “for the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and give his life a ransom for many.” Jesus is our true example of humility! Find ways today to humble yourself by serving others, not so that God will exalt you, but that he would be made famous by your words and deeds.

# OCTOBER 30

## *Daniel 5*



**B**Y THIS TIME IN HISTORY, DANIEL WAS WELL KNOWN FOR THE WORKS THAT HE DID IN THE NAME OF JEHOVAH.

These gifts from God helped him to interpret dreams and become known as the intelligent exile from Israel. In the meantime, when cultish acts are happening at the palace, Daniel was summoned again to interpret the meaning of a sign. Another king had come to power, and in the eyes of Belshazzar, Daniel was just an foreigner from Judah. However, Belshazzar grossly underestimated Daniel because he refused to acknowledge the power of the most high God.

As the story goes, “In that moment the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and began writing on the plaster of the king’s palace next to a lampstand. As the king watched the hand that was writing, his face turned pale” (5-6). Eventually, through Daniel, Belshazzar learned that the Babylonian empire would be stripped from his hand, divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. Belshazzar was executed that very night, proving once again that the proud will be humbled by God.

Those who love Christ will suffer persecution. We will also be underestimated because of the lack of faith that many people have in the power of the eternal God. Remember this fact, If our God is for us, who can stand against us (Romans 8:31-34)?

Examine yourself for patches of sensitivity. Pray that insults would fall from your attention, and that you would see your worth in Christ alone. Be bold, not with confidence in yourself, but in God as you trust his leadership and submit your will to him.

# OCTOBER 31

## *Daniel 6*



**T**HROUGH HIS FAITHFULNESS TO SERVE GOD, AND CONTINUE TO SEEK GOD IN PRAYER, DANIEL WAS ENTRAPPED.

Things turn difficult for Daniel. He was quickly opposed, judged, and sentenced. Yet another king had taken power under the Medo-Persian empire, and put Daniel in charge over all administrators of the land. Because of others' jealousy, the subordinate satraps told King Darius to put in effect a 30 day decree, "anyone who petitions any god or man except you ... will be thrown into the lions' den" (7). Fortunately, Daniel was preserved and vindicated. Through that extreme persecution, Daniel's faith was not shaken; rather, it was strengthened.

James 1:2 instructs us to, "count it all joy when we fall into various trials." Daniel, although trapped by the legalities of government, still prayed to God and devoted himself to serving Jehovah. He didn't seek his joy in the activities of life, company of friends, or position of power. Daniel's joy was found solely in pleasing God! That is how Daniel remained joyful throughout this trial. It is inevitable that you will face bumps in the road. We must, however, surrender our sacrifices and schedules to God! If God works all things to the counsel of his will, why do we get bent out of shape when our timelines are pushed back by unseen obstacles!

Examine your bumps in the road. Fortunately, it probably won't be a trip to the lions' den! First, be joyful in Christ and his salvation, and not in your accomplishments! Second, submit your schedule to God by acknowledging that he's not only in control of the things, but he's in control of your entire future!

# NOVEMBER 1

*Daniel 7-9*



**W**HETHER OUR CONCERNS ARE POLITICAL, PASTORAL, OR PERSONAL, OUR GOD IS ALWAYS ADVOCATING HIS WILL.

Daniel 7-9 cover two prophecies and a prayer. We read about four beasts, the ram, goat, and little horn, and Daniel's prayer concerning the 70 weeks. Not only are we told of visions, but we're granted interpretation! There are many debates to how these prophecies fit into our future, but we must stick to the principles of Christ today.

We can all agree these prophecies have dire implications from fearful events, but a child of God has no reason to fear! We are stewards of God for use in his kingdom! Though we do not know the specific day when God will glorify himself through us, we believe he will. We should trust him because he always makes good on his promises!

The prophecy concerning the first 69 weeks (7 years each) of Daniel was fulfilled to the day. Matthew also teaches many of the prophecies fulfilled by Jesus. Consider the promises that God made concerning his kingdom - not when it will come, but if it has come? Consider God's promise to provide everything we need, but to first seek the kingdom of God! Acknowledge that Jesus is king by obeying his commands. Matthew 22:37 says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said on these two laws "hang all of the law and prophets," which include Old Testament prophecy.

We seek the kingdom by serving the king! What are some areas in your life that you're hesitant to sacrifice to serve the king? Could it be your time, money, or energy? Pride, insecurity, or discontent? Identify and remove obstacles that keep you from serving your king.

# NOVEMBER 2

*Daniel 10-12*



**T**HE ESCHATOLOGY IN THESE CONCLUDING CHAPTERS FEATURES A HEAVENLY CONFLICT, EARTHLY CONFLICTS, AND RESURRECTIONS TO GLORY OR SHAME.

God's vast judgment comes upon the world, followed by his mercy toward his children. God's awesome might is revealed to all of creation, and will tremble at his sight!

Once again, we are faced with some highly debated eschatology; however, we will focus on God's holiness through his wrath, and his love through mercy. Looking upon the judgment that God exacts upon his creation, it reveals how much that God despises sin. Since all of creation was cursed and affected by the sin of Adam and Eve, all of the earth must be purged of sin in order to be fully reconciled back to God. Believers can rest knowing that the wrath meant for his adopted children was placed fully upon Jesus at the cross.

When is the last time you thanked God for pouring out his wrath meant for you, instead upon Jesus? In his holiness, we all fall short and deserve death (Romans 3:23; 6:23). Through his love, mercy is available to all who believe the gospel. (Romans 5:8' 10-9-10)

Today, appreciate the awesome saving power of God. Dwell upon his righteous judgment for sin. Consider your own shortcomings. Death is all to which we used to look forward, and an eternity in hell. Although, Christ took our place in death, and made us exempt from hell. Thanks be to God! Meditate on God's mercy toward you, and extend mercy to those around you in return. They may not deserve mercy, but neither did you!



# NOVEMBER 3

*Hosea 1:2*



**O**FTEN, WHEN WE READ THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT, WE CAN FEEL SHOCKED AT THE SINS AND STUPIDITY OF GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE, ISRAEL.

"They did that?" "Why would they do that when God has just been so good to them?" I can't believe they would be so foolish!"

Those are all thoughts that have a tendency to run through my head when I read through passages such as Exodus 16:2. A few chapters prior, God has miraculously led Israel out of captivity and parted the Red Sea, an amazing display of power and providence. But in this passage, the Israelites are hungry in the wilderness, and they begin to grumble, saying, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full". They start to doubt God, even in the aftermath of his incredible power, so they begin to long for former slavery and their worship begins to be misplaced.

Then the story of Hosea. God commands Hosea to marry a prostitute and be totally faithful to her. What is the significance of this? Why would God command something so unusual?

Ultimately, God's purpose in this is to display Israel's spiritual whoredom and unfaithfulness, as they have been unfaithful to the covenant God made with them. So have we. How many of us have seen God's awesome power and providence, but turned back to sin?

But praise be to God, as his faithfulness is never failing and his mercy is never ending. He brings us back. He is faithful to his covenant with us in Christ. He doesn't give up on us.

# NOVEMBER 4

*Hosea 6:1-7*



**I**F THERE'S ONE THING WE HUMANS ARE GOOD AT, IT'S RUNNING AWAY.

From pain, responsibility, confrontation – you name it. Typically, running away is easier, or at least, that's what we think. However, when the one to whom our backs are turned is the King of Kings himself, our souls shout a very different command.

“Return.”

Not to a vengeful being eager to point out our wrongdoings and remind us of our shortcomings, and not to one who has lost his patience and left us deserted upon our eventual return. We return to the one who has promised to heal us and to bind us up, whose “going out is as sure as the dawn.” Who else not only waits through our rebellion, but joyfully welcomes us back and gives us ultimate fulfillment in our lives, time and time again?

But what must we offer to God once we find our ways back? Surely he will ask something in return for our fickleness. Sacrifices and burnt offerings will not do; all that is asked of us is our love. God wants us, our love, our knowledge of him, and our obedience. Though the things of this world will distract us and entice us, nothing will satisfy our hearts more than our creator.

So let us know him. “Let us press on to know the Lord” (3). And let us experience the greatest of loves that calls us to show the same love to others.

# NOVEMBER 5

*Hosea 14: 4-7*



**W**E AREN'T MERELY ONLOOKERS IN THIS STORY;  
WE ARE HOSEA'S WIFE.

Earlier in this book, we learn about the life of Hosea, a man called by God to take a wife involved in a promiscuous lifestyle. Though all signs might tell Hosea to run from such a woman, to abandon her and leave her in her sin, Hosea obeyed the Lord and demonstrated selfless love and patience toward his wife. Would any of us think that the wife deserved such mercy, given her rebellion? We would probably advise Hosea to wash his hands of her and find someone more suitable for his way of life. But praise God, Hosea listened to the Lord.

How often do we find ourselves dissatisfied with our relationship with God, coming and going whenever we please? We find ourselves in constant worship of the things of this world when all the while, God is calling us back to himself.

Surely Hosea's wife was not worthy of such sacrificial love. Surely Hosea was keeping track of the amount of times he was wronged by his wife, waiting to repay her error at any time. Though these responses might make sense to us, neither are the case.

Like Hosea's wife did not seem worthy of her husband's love, neither are we worthy of the relentless love of God. God promises to love us freely, keeping no record of wrongs and healing us from our transgressions.

The only logical response to the love God has shown us is to serve him forever, and to make his name known to the ends of the earth. This gift freely given to us is offered to all those who repent and believe; may we use our freedom to see his name rightly exalted in all corners of the world.

# NOVEMBER 6

*Joel 1*



**T**HERE ARE DAYS IN LIFE THAT WE TRY TO FORGET. FOR SOME, IT MIGHT BE THAT DIVORCE, OR BANKRUPTCY. FOR OTHERS, IT MIGHT BE THE DAY THE DOCTOR EXPLAINED THE DISCOVERY OF A CANCEROUS TUMOR, OR GRANDMOTHER'S ALZHEIMER'S DIAGNOSIS.

Regardless of the struggle, those days are ones put on the back burner of the mind because there was little or no warning, and the person is doing their best to deal with the consequences of life's storms.

Those events are one thing, but the prophet Joel had another way of letting Israel about the future – a warning! I am always thankful for the warnings on the beach of dangerous undertow because I have a terrible fear of drowning. When I see that red flag blowing on the beach, I do not go into the ocean. Joel's warning was even more clear than that, "Woe because of that day! For the Day of the LORD is near and will come as devastation from the Almighty" (15). This cautioning was not to be ignored but sternly heeded. A locust plague had already come to Judah as written at the beginning of the chapter, and the people were starving to death. This caution was not enough for them to recognize the danger. This is the introduction to the eschatological phrase, Day of the LORD. Four observations that should be made clear to the reader: it was coming, it was near, it was destructive, and it was sent by God himself.

The warning of the Day of the LORD from Joel is a now but not yet prophetic line. The locust had already come, but the coming of the LORD was near. For Israel, the day came and went, and soon it will come for the world as we know it. Let us be like Joel and warn those around us of the day to come and the Savior that we know.

# NOVEMBER 7

## *Joel 2*



**J**OEL IS A HIGHLY DEBATED PROPHETIC BOOK, AND FULL OF WONDERFUL IMAGERIES AND PROMISES.

Using Joel for a devotional, therefore, it is helpful to focus on the things that we can clearly understand. Chapter 2, verses 28-32, leaves the believer with much hope. Yes, this book is eschatological, but it also has many other possible implications.

First, remember that the Spirit is not indwelt in each believer as in the New Testament. Therefore, as God promises to “pour out My Spirit on all humanity” in verse 28, this phrase is interesting because water and oil are often used as imagery of the anointing of the Spirit. Whether God was talking about a representation of the Spirit in Israel at the time, or a future pouring out, is debatable. Some scholars believe it is both.

Second, Duane Garnett, in the “New American Commentary,” says, “The text specifically erases the major social distinctions of the ancient world ... In an era in which men (not women), the old (not the young), and the landowners (not slaves) ruled society.” All this to say, it is God who chooses whom will receive the Spirit and when it is time. When this outpouring occurs, then or now, people will prophesy, have dreams, and see visions that have never been seen or heard of before. That day will be remarkable one, but one thing we must remember – it could be going on even now. Do not discount God when you do not see with your own eyes everything that he might be accomplishing.

Be aware of God’s Spirit working around you, and as Henry Blackaby said 25 years ago, “join him there.” Also, don’t be timid in asking God to continue to pour out his Spirit on you, on your family, on your church, on our state, and on the ministry in which God has you.

# NOVEMBER 8

*Joel 3*



**W**HEN AN ARMY WOULD WIN A BATTLE, OR A WAR, THE SPOILS OF WAR WOULD BE DISPLAYED FOR ALL THE PEOPLE TO SEE.

Those spoils include idols, gold, slaves, and even captured soldiers. They were on display as a show of defeat and humility of the losing army. Though Israel lost the battles to the Assyrians and the Babylonians, God still had their good in mind. For Israel, it was to their advantage to lose. Yes, they had lost land, houses, and even their lives, God had a wonderful plan to restore them.

God gives them a promise of restoration and blessing. He says, “They you will know that I am the LORD your God ... and foreigners will never overrun it again” (17). To this day, that promise has stood firm. Just one example, in June of 1967, the Arab nations of the area chose to wage war against Israel. It last a whole six days, thus, the Six Day War. God’s people will always be protected and eventually restored as he promises.

God also promised in verse 18, “the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills will flow with milk.” These promises echo those given to Abraham thousands of years ago. We must never doubt that God will fulfill his promises or he ceases to be God.

In Matthew 28:20b, Jesus told his disciples, “remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Take a moment to couple the promises of God in the Old Testament with the promise of Christ. You may sense that he has left you – so did Israel, and so did the disciples. Be reminded that God is eternal and lives inside of you eternally!

# NOVEMBER 9

## *Amos 1*



**G**OD'S WORD IS CLEAR. HE OPPOSES THE PROUD BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

He calls for his people to consider others more important than themselves. The commands could not have been more clear, even in the Old Testament, to love God and love your neighbor.

However, Israel disobeyed. She lost her way. The people had become rich and comfortable. They were more concerned about themselves and getting what they wanted than they were about the poor and underprivileged. They had forgotten the humble state of slavery that they had risen from by the mighty hand of God, and they were now enslaving others.

Israel was also turning from the pure worship of Yahweh to the worship of false gods. Religious feasts were mixed with pagan practices. The burnt offerings that had once been a sweet aroma, were now a stench in the nostrils of God. He would surely judge his people, and demand a pure heart of love and worship toward him. The message: God takes sin seriously.

Do we believe this? Have we been lulled into a sin sickness that results in selfishness and pride? Do we mingle carelessly and dangerously with the world and its desires? God's grace has been showered on us, just as it was to the people of Israel. They were redeemed from slavery and given a new life. We too have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus and given new life in Christ. Have we forgotten these things? Have we become complacent and corrupt?

God will judge. God will discipline. But, God will also restore and redeem. The call of God is repent and turn back to him.

# NOVEMBER 10

*Amos 5:5-6*



**A**S AMOS PREACHES ABOUT THE IMPENDING JUDGMENT OF GOD, HE TELLS THE PEOPLE THAT THERE IS A WAY TO LIVE.

I remember when my oldest son was 4 years old and began to run a fever one night. We knew that if we did not find help for him, the consequences would be severe. He might even die. It did not take much to convince me that I should seek medical attention for my son. It made perfect sense. And, I was overjoyed when his health returned. I felt like he had been given a second chance.

Amos says to seek Yahweh and live. There is a connection here between seeking God, and living. There is life in the one true God. There is death in sin. This connection is made even more explicit later in the chapter when he says in order to live you must seek good and not evil.

However, the people had turned away from God. They were arrogantly living their lives in open rebellion to God. Worship had become a meaningless ritual, while self-indulgence had become the real religion of the people. Instead of pursuing justice and mercy, they became greedy and selfish. God would not allow his people to live like this. He cannot allow it. A holy and just God must punish sin.

You see, the people were sick. They were dying from sin sickness and the situation was beyond urgent. They must find help. In love, he admonished them to seek out the one who can heal. Yahweh is that one.

The gospel teaches that there is hope through judgment. Correctly understood, the gospel tells us that through divine judgment (the cross of Christ), there is life. If we will seek Jesus we will find life in him - new life and healing.



# NOVEMBER 11

*Amos 5:10-11*



**A**BUSE OF POWER AND SOCIAL INJUSTICE HAD BECOME THE NORM OF THE DAY FOR THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.

They hated what the one true God loves. They despised what wise men honor. In the Ten Commandments we are warned against giving false testimony. Proverbs tells us that God hates a lying witness. And yet, this is exactly what the people were doing.

Power and greed were destroying the nation. The “haves” were taking from the “have nots.” Excessive taxation and corrupt legal proceedings resulted in many who were rich beyond imagination. They lived in houses of cut stone. Brick and mortar was beneath them. They must have only the very best. However, this left many more who were down trodden and underprivileged.

We live in a world of greed and injustice. Jesus told the story of a man who was hurt and injured by robbers. A number of people passed by him and did nothing to help this man who needed help. Finally, a compassionate man passed by. He was a different race from the injured man. He came from a different culture. He could have ignored the injured man just like everyone else had ignored him. However, he stopped and did the right thing. He helped the man. He bound up his wounds and took him to a place where he could be cared for.

I wonder how many opportunities we have each day to show similar love to the people around us. Are we living by the commands of God, to love him and love others, or are we selfishly pursuing our own wants and desires to the neglect of the hurting ones around us? Take time today to examine your heart and ask God to give you compassion and love for those around you.

# NOVEMBER 12

*Amos 6*



**A**LL OF US ARE PROBABLY TEMPTED, TO ONE DEGREE OR ANOTHER, TO PUT OUR TRUST IN MATERIAL SECURITY.

On a national and international level we desire a large army and strong economy. In our homes we hope for retirement accounts and other investments to grow. From a very young age, we are trained to go to school and do well so that we can get a good job. If we are not careful, these aspirations can become our main focus in life, and actually lead us away from the one true God.

This temptation can be difficult to fight when we actually realize a certain level of wealth. As our ability to take care of ourselves grows, we can think more highly of ourselves than we ought, and we forget that it is the hand of God that provides our every need.

This happened to Israel. They were wealthy and secure. They spent time in excessive leisure, entertaining themselves and drinking wine by the bowlful. They did not care about moral decay, social injustice, or God's judgment on their misdirected security.

However, that is exactly what was about to happen. Jacob's pride was soon to become his shame. His security would come to an end, with captivity and ruin to take its place. The Bible teaches us that pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). The people of Israel experienced this in a bitterly painful way when they were taken into exile.

Amos' warnings should ring clear. We are a blessed people with wealth and security that other nations dream of. Are we using this for God's glory, or are we spending it all on ourselves? Are we seeking to be a blessing to the nations, or are we feeding our own desires and wishes?

# NOVEMBER 13

## *Amos 9*



**I**AM NOT MUCH OF A HANDYMAN. I CAN FIX SOME THINGS AROUND THE HOUSE, BUT IF IT IS A BIG JOB, I NEED HELP.

The Bible teaches us that “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). He is very good at making things. He knows just how they work best. He is a master builder. Not only is he a master builder, he is also a master rebuilder.

In Genesis 3 we see how sin entered the world, and things begin to unravel and fall away from the way God originally intended them to be. Death becomes a universal law. Rebellion and selfish desire become the norm for humankind. This was evident during the time of Amos’ preaching. Israel was not following Yahweh. Things were broken.

Brokenness doesn’t surprise God. He is not shocked by it, nor is he perplexed about a solution. No person or group of people is beyond his reach. There is no dilemma that is too difficult for him to make right. He told his people Israel, who had rebelled and turned away, that he would restore them. He would rebuild the house of David.

There is a beautiful promise hidden inside this promise. God made a covenant with David that his house and throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7). God knew when he made that covenant that David would sin, and that his people throughout the generations would sin.

You see, when God made the promise, he wasn’t just looking toward the future of one man or one nation. He was looking into his beautiful plan for all people. He was looking to the day when Jesus would come to restore and make all things new.

# NOVEMBER 14

*Obadiah 1:1-4*



**T**HE BOOK OF OBADIAH IS ONE OF THOSE BOOKS THAT KEEPS THE PAGES TURNING A LITTLE LONGER IN CHURCH AS PEOPLE SEARCH FOR IT.

With only 21 verses, this address is the smallest book of the Bible. We know very little about the author. You may think the book of Obadiah is insignificant. However, I want to draw your attention to, “Thus says the Lord God.” The words in this passage are not from Obadiah, they are from the omnipotent Creator, and reveal several attributes of his being.

**God’s sovereignty:** This passage is a warning to the Edomites. They had followed the path of their patriarch Esau to the point of comfort in their rebellion and were a bitter enemy of God’s chosen Israel. Do not be deceived, God is sovereign and does not allow rebellion to go unchecked. He goes on to explicitly explain the magnitude of the destruction the Edomites will experience in his timing

**God’s love:** His love is revealed twofold. The first is in the defense of his people. The Edomites frequently clashed with God’s chosen people. God showed his love for his people by assuring the destruction of their persecutors. But also, God shows love by warning the Edomites. The people of Edom deserved destruction, but God extended a warning in loving mercy.

These few words recorded by an obscure man, proclaiming the judgment of our God, give us intimate understanding of the Creator’s attributes. The God who was sovereign over the Edomites is sovereign over our lives. The God who lovingly defended his people, still does. The God who extended loving mercy to those in rebellion, still extends his mercy to us today.

# NOVEMBER 15

*Obadiah 1:15*



**F**OR THE DAY OF THE LORD IS NEAR UPON ALL THE NATIONS. AS YOU HAVE DONE, IT SHALL BE DONE TO YOU; YOUR DEEDS SHALL RETURN ON YOUR OWN HEAD" (OBADIAH 1:15).

God's judgment is a scary reality. Often times in our church culture, we like to try to focus on one aspect of God's character and not the other. For me, I grew up in a church that was very quick to talk about the judgment of God. God's judgment was a reality, God's judgment was coming, and unless you repented, God's judgment and wrath was on you. These are all very true things, and were things I needed to hear as a teenager, but it wasn't all I needed to hear.

The grace and mercy of God found in Jesus is vital when discussing the eminent wrath and judgment of God on the world. Just as real, as eminent, and as wholly pervasive on the world is God's wrath, the same is true for the grace of God in Jesus. God's judgment in Obadiah 1:15 was on the Edomites for opposing God and his power, walking in disobedience to his laws. If we are honest with ourselves, we often do the same.

Today, let's embrace the fact that the cross is two-folded: a magnificent picture of God's mercy but also a stark reminder of God's wrath and judgment on mankind. Let's be a people who embrace the mercy that covers God's wrath and be on God's side.

# NOVEMBER 16

## *Jonah 1*



**L**ET'S DIVE IN TO JONAH. NO PUN INTENDED. WHERE ARE YOU SAYING "NO" TO GOD?

For Jonah, it was God's call to go to Nineveh and preach. History tells us the Ninevites were some of the cruelest people in the ancient world, so this sheds a little light why Jonah's fears got the best of him and brought about a very blatant "no."

In Jonah's rebellion, opting to run away 1,500 miles in the opposite direction, God stirs a huge storm in which we find two reminders:

**1. Our disobedience affects those around us, too.** The sailors on the ship realized Jonah was running from God and asked, "What have you done? What are we going to do to get rid of the storm?" The best gift we can give our family, our communities, West Virginia, our country, and the world is our obedience to God. People are dying and going to hell, and God wants to use us, but often we're sound asleep, in our sin, in the hull of the ship.

**2. God sends storms to break of us self-reliance.** Jonah believed he knew better for his life than God. If Jonah had continued to fight the storm, it would have killed him and all aboard. When he submitted to the storm and said, "throw me into the sea," it led to his ultimate salvation.

I've heard it said that the storms of life are not there to pay us back for our sins, but rather bring us back from our sins. Jesus was paid back for our sins. Jesus willingly sailed into the storm of God's wrath for us and bore it all. This means wrath and retribution are no longer in the storm, but only his love and restoration.

Stop running. Surrender and follow God wherever he sends you. He wants to use you greater than you've ever dreamed ... and he will.

# NOVEMBER 17

## *Jonah 2*



**A**FTER THREE DAYS AND NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF A FISH, WOULD YOU BE INCLINED TO LIFT UP A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING TO GOD?

Jonah ultimately recognized the fish was not God's judgment. Rather, the fish was God's mercy that saved Jonah from the depths of the sea. Jonah cried out, "But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!" Finally, God makes the fish bring Jonah back to dry land.

It took Jonah 3 days and nights to get to this point though. His prayer also offers a glimpse into the depths of his struggle - worshipping hollow gods, feeling banished from God's sight, and calling out to God.

There's a lot of us in Jonah. We obey God in all areas of life except those areas hard to turn over, and then we say, "no." When we turn to idols, we forfeit the grace, joy, and steadfast love found in God through Jesus. God wants better for us than the the fleeting comforts when we make good things god things. Is there an idol in your life causing you to turn your focus away from God?

There's a lot of Jesus in Jonah, too. Jonah was cast out into an abyss for three days. Jonah's prayer sounds a lot like Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane. He went down to the deep, had the weeds of sin wrap around his head, and as death closed in, Jesus wondered why God had forsaken him.

You and I will probably never go through what Jonah went through because Jesus went through it for us and defeated the grave.

Is God's passions your passions? Do you love your "Ninevites?" This comes from realizing it's not what you can do for God, but what he's already done for you.

# NOVEMBER 18

## *Jonah 3*



**J**ONAH STOOD IN THE WAY OF NINEVEH'S FORGIVENESS. THEIR SIN WASN'T THE OBSTACLE.

Are you keeping people from experiencing the grace God by failing to pray for them and sharing God's word with them?

"Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time ..."  
Aren't you thankful that God gives second chances? God wants to use you to bring people to himself. The Bible is full of men and women who needed a second chance. God uses broken people, and often times people who ran away from him, to deliver his message. God doesn't need us, our eloquence, or talents. Charles Spurgeon offers perspective on God empowering Jonah for mission:

"By a singular providence [God] qualifies that one man for his mission. He sends him down into the very depths of the sea, where the weeds are wrapped about him, he comes up from the great deep, and the awful descent has steeled his soul and completely covered him with the armor of courageous faith. Who need tremble at anything on shore who has passed the bowels of a fish and yet survived? He comes into the city, his eyes almost starting from their sockets with the recollection of the great judgment which had passed over his head, and in stern inflexible manner, with shrill monotonous voice, he begins to cry, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!'"

As a result, Jonah preaches eight English words (5 in Hebrew), "and the people of Nineveh believed God."

God wanted to, and could, save the Ninevites. The obstacle was Jonah. God wants to, and can, save the people in West Virginia. The obstacle is our inaction. We are called to go and make Jesus known.



# NOVEMBER 19

## *Jonah 4*



**T**ALK ABOUT A PLOT TWIST! WE FIND OUT JONAH DIDN'T RUN AWAY BECAUSE HE WAS AFRAID THE NINEVITES WOULD REJECT HIS MESSAGE. RATHER, HE RAN AWAY BECAUSE HE WAS AFRAID THEY WOULD ACCEPT IT.

Jonah should be celebrating God relenting of his plan to destroy Nineveh, but instead loses his temper with God for not destroying Nineveh. Jonah has a hard time understanding why after ignoring God once, he found himself in the belly of a big fish. The Ninevites were atrocious for decades - mercilessly oppressing and murdering thousands of Jonah's people - and God simply chose to forgive them. In his distress, Jonah pleads, "O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

This is a good reminder that God decides who receives mercy, and not us. "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Exodus 33, Romans 9).

We don't extend mercy and love as God does. We forget we are equally "dirty" without Christ, and that God expends equal forgiveness to cleanse each person. God is gracious and compassionate. He doesn't desire punishment for sin, but repentance from it. This is good news!

Ultimately, God takes Jonah through a series of circumstances to show him that his heart doesn't fully belong to God.

What is your attitude toward non-believers around you? There is not one sinner God cannot redeem. What are you doing to extend the gospel to the most needy in your town - the homeless, the orphans, the prisoners, the unwed mothers, the high school drop-outs, and at-risk kids?

# NOVEMBER 20

## *Micah 1*



**G**OD COMMANDS ATTENTION AND RESPECT BECAUSE HE IS THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE.

When I was involved in football as a young man, my coaches were very passionate about winning. Even in sixth grade, every game seemed like we were playing in the Super Bowl! When I ran the wrong play, missed a block, or became lazy, my coach consistently instructed me well. His favorite thing to do was grab me by the facemask to get my attention. You cannot do that in today's world, but back then it was common practice. It was a great way to make sure that I knew I had messed up, and I surely did not want him to do that again. He would then say, "listen up son," and commence to explain my mistakes. It was a very effective tool of coaching in the 1970's.

God has a way of doing that same thing, but through words. Whatever he says goes. Israel knew that fact, but chose to go their own way. In verse 2, God says, "Listen, all you peoples; pay attention, earth and everyone in it!" Our God is serious about his relationship with his people, including Gentiles, as we have been grafted into the vine of life. The Hebrew word "listen" is the same word used in Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel. The LORD your God, the LORD is One."

According to the "New American Commentary," "hear means to listen, understand, and respond to it appropriately." Deuteronomy specifically refers to Israel, but Micah is addressing all the nations of the earth. God has progressively expanded his judgment to all nations on the earth. All peoples will be responsible to God for their actions.

# NOVEMBER 21

## *Micah 3*



**M**ICAH HAD NO PROBLEM TAKING SHOTS AT THE LEADERS OF ISRAEL, BUT NEITHER DID ISAIAH, OR EZEKIEL.

Leadership is not a right, but rather a privilege. All leadership is given by God, and for that matter, can be taken away. Micah says, “you rulers of the house of Israel. Aren’t you suppose to know what is just?” (1), “you lead people astray” (5), and “you abhor justice” (9). God makes it clear through Micah that the leaders had failed their people. There is a difference between making a mistake and practicing evil in your position. Judgment should match the crime.

Years before I became a pastor, I longed to be one. I looked at the position as glamorous, exciting, and fun. Then I became one. I realized that part of the job was exciting and fun, but there was nothing ever glamorous about it. One day, God revealed to me that it was not just a job or position, rather a calling. I tend to believe that is also true about most leadership positions, especially within the church. Think about it. If all leaders, volunteers, and members saw their work, and time with God for the church as a calling, it would transform the church as we know it.

If you are in a leadership, take some today to evaluate your attitude and why you serve in that position. Consider, “Not many should become teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment; for we all stumble in many ways” (James 3:1-2). Maybe we should consider all leadership a form of teaching.

# NOVEMBER 22

## *Micah 5*



**T**HERE'S A TRAVELING PREACHER AND HIS WIFE WHO ARE LIVING IN POVERTY. THEY ALREADY HAVE FOURTEEN CHILDREN. NOW SHE FINDS OUT SHE'S PREGNANT WITH THE 15TH CHILD.

They are very poor and probably will be unable to afford a doctor's attention. Considering their poverty, the excessive world population, and the number of children they already have, what would you recommend they do with the new baby? Oh, and by the way, this is John Wesley's story, the 18th Century preacher and evangelist.

When Philip met Jesus, he quickly told Nathanael about him. His response was probably typical of many in that region, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46) The better question might be, "Could any good come out of the obscure little town of Bethlehem?" Only about 5 miles from Jerusalem, no one cared about this sleepy town that gave nothing back to the community, the world, or to Israel.

I am so glad that Mary was pro-choice as she loved and protected her baby. I am also thankful for Joseph, who obeyed the Lord the best he knew how. When Joseph traveled with Mary to Bethlehem for the census, little did he know what was happening. He was fulfilling the prophetic Scripture in Micah 5:2, "Bethlehem, Ephraim, you are small among the clans of Judah: One will come from you to be ruler over Israel for Me."

Be the defender of the small, and the weak. One never knows what kind of significance one person might make in the future of humanity or for the Kingdom of God. The Lord sees all people as significant in the light of creation and the gospel.

# NOVEMBER 23

*Nahum 1:3*



**F**EW TODAY ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE ORACLE OF NAHUM. NAHUM'S MESSAGE OF DIVINE FURY IS TOO BRUTISH FOR MODERN, "CIVILIZED" MAN, SO THE BOOK IS OFTEN LEFT TO COLLECT DUST.

But this is quite surprising. A book about divine retribution would seem exceptionally relevant to the age of mass media. Every day news outlets remind us of the unspeakable evil in our world. This past year we watched Christians beheaded for their faith. Do we really think God turns a blind eye to such atrocities? If we do, Nahum is here to tell us otherwise.

Nahum's oracle is directed against Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. The Assyrians dominated the Middle East at this time. Their wickedness was so great and their kingdom was so vast that Nahum could say, "For upon whom has not come your unceasing evil?" (3:19) The Assyrians scoffed at Yahweh. As their king said, "Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?" (2 Kings 18:35) In other words, Yahweh is nothing.

Well, Yahweh isn't nothing. "The mountains quake before him" (1:5). Yahweh sent Nahum to tell the Assyrians that their sin will be punished. God is slow to anger, but he is not corrupt. He will not let evil reign forever. As Johnny Cash so eloquently put it, "You can run on for a long time, but sooner or later God will cut you down." That is the message of Nahum.

# NOVEMBER 24

*Nahum 1:7-8*



**N**AHUM IS A BOOK ABOUT DIVINE JUDGMENT. IN NAHUM, GOD'S POWER AND WRATH ARE PRESENTED IN ALL THEIR FULLNESS.

We learn that Yahweh, the Divine Warrior, will obliterate all those who oppose him. Nahum draws on imagery of Noah and the great flood to remind Nineveh that God will annihilate all his enemies. There will be no escaping his wrath. In the same manner that the floodwaters covered the entire earth, so God's vengeance will find out all his adversaries.

This picture is so threatening that one can only be left to ask the same question Nahum asks, "Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger?" (1:6). Fortunately, Nahum gives us an answer, "The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him" (1:7).

There is a safe place in the flood of God's fury. Just as Noah found shelter in the ark, so we can take refuge in Jesus. God is good. He is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:6-7).

All those who trust in him will not be put to shame. So do not be found opposing Yahweh. Like Noah, get in the boat. You will find true and lasting happiness there.

# NOVEMBER 25

*Nahum 1:15*



**N**AHUM IS A BOOK ABOUT GOD'S WRATH, AND IT'S MEANT TO INSPIRE HOPE IN GOD'S PEOPLE. HOW CAN THAT BE?

Well, imagine being an Israelite at this time. You are suffering mightily under the hand of an Assyrian Empire who seems indestructible. Wickedness reigns all around you. All you can ask is "how long, O LORD?"

In come the words of Nahum, God's prophet, for Israel, "God wins!" It may seem like Assyria is unbeatable, but God will bring them to nothing and restore peace on earth. What are the Israelites to do in the meantime? They are to keep their feasts and fulfill their vows. In other words, be faithful. They are to keep trusting and obeying Yahweh. Since he will win in the end, none of their present obedience is in vain.

This message is just as applicable for us today. God wins! Jesus already disarmed his enemies at the cross and put them to open shame (Colossians 2:15). We're just waiting for him to put all his enemies under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). And what do we do in the meantime? We keep our feasts and fulfill our vows. We obey Christ's commands. We go therefore and make disciples of all nations, knowing we can't lose.

In this world, we will have enemies. In this world, we will face tribulation. But take heart; Christ has overcome the world. Let his victory renew your spirit and drive you to faithfulness today.

# NOVEMBER 26

*Nahum 2:2*



**H**AVE YOU EVER GONE THROUGH A REALLY BAD NATURAL DISASTER? A FIRE? A FLOOD? SOMETHING THAT CAN DESTROY BOTH LIFE AND PROPERTY?

In the summer of 2016, the state of West Virginia went through one of the worst natural disasters in the history of the state. Flood waters across the state destroyed millions of dollars of property and took many lives along with it. It was a heartbreaking time for our people, and the cleanup and restoration work will take years to complete.

While restoration from natural disasters can take a long time, and many things that were lost will never be restored, a different tune comes from the grace of Jesus. Revelation 21:5 says, “And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’” Jesus says that one day, all things will be made new by him. This isn’t just a physical restoration of the things we have now, but is a restoration of all things and a bringing home of us, his church, to be with him and worship him in Heaven. This is a reality for the people of God.

Today, you may be reeling from recent loss or from the pain of life, but please know, Jesus is making all things new and is in control.



# NOVEMBER 27

*Habakkuk 1:5*



**T**HE LORD SAYS TO BE ASTOUNDED BECAUSE HE'S DOING SOMETHING SO AMAZING THAT NO ONE WOULD BELIEVE IT EVEN IF TOLD.

If you're like me, you probably enjoyed reading this verse in isolation. What a beautiful thought, right? Contextually, the Lord's words have a slightly grimmer meaning, but perhaps our response can still a joyful one.

The Lord's words here are those of harsh judgment and punishment on those who disobey him. He continues to tell that he is raising up the Chaldeans, a fearsome and hateful nation, to come against Judah.

I think God's response to Habakkuk's pleas can teach us several things. First, we see that nothing is outside of our God's control; he orchestrates even the seemingly terrible things and eventually turns them into instruments adding to his glory. Second, we see that God is worthy of fear, awe, and reverence. And third, we see the fate that awaits those who oppose God and refuse to submit to his authority.

Now for the good news.

This same God, this powerful and imaginative God who orchestrates armies, is the same God who promises to fight for us. This is the same God who promises to work all things for our good and his glory until the end of time.

May we find rest in knowing that this is the God whose side we are on, the God who makes our enemies his footstool. And may we be drawn to live in constant awe of the mighty God we serve.

# NOVEMBER 28

*Habakkuk 3:1-16*



**H**ABAKKUK PLEADS WITH GOD TO STOP THE INJUSTICE AND VIOLENCE IN JUDAH, BUT IS SURPRISED TO FIND THAT GOD WILL USE THE EVEN MORE VIOLENT BABYLONIANS TO DO SO.”  
-JEFFREY KRANZ

When I was growing up, my friends and I loved to watch UFC fights on television. Something about the raw talent, toughness, and strength just connected with the testosterone we had as males and we couldn’t get enough of it. One of the most interesting things I noticed, however, was not the strength of the bigger guys, but was the subversive strength of the smaller ones. These matches would feature smaller guys taking down bigger ones and seeing that always pumped up my friends and I. It seems that we misunderstood what true strength really was.

But if we’re being honest, I think we all do. How many of us view strength as being something we have? The Bible seems to paint a different picture. Just as King David, a small man, took down Goliath, Habakkuk claims strength from the same source: The Lord God. God was the strength of these men, and if we truly want to be strong and victorious in life against temptation and the power of sin, we must rely on God as our strength.

How can you do that today? How about taking the next five minutes to go to the Lord in prayer and ask him for strength and sustenance for the day ahead of you. Jesus commands us to pray similarly in Matthew 6:11, “Give us this day our daily bread.” We need the Lord to be our strength and to sustain us today and every-day. Press into that truth.

# NOVEMBER 29

*Habakkuk 3:17-19*



**H**ABAKKUK MIGHT BE A SHORT BOOK, BUT DON'T BE FOOLED, THERE'S PLENTY OF STRIFE, WARS, AND ENEMIES FILLING ITS THREE CHAPTERS.

After such turmoil, it might be difficult for us to imagine carrying on, let alone rejoicing. In the closing of this book, Habakkuk demonstrates an appropriate response to whatever situation in which we might find ourselves, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation" (18).

I will rejoice.

Though nothing is going according to plan, though wealth might be depleted, though there is no guarantee of a prosperous tomorrow, we will rejoice. Because though circumstances might rob us of our comforts or temporary pleasures, eternal joy is found God himself, the God of our salvation. And when the root of our joy is found in the person of God, nothing can rob us of our eternal delight in him.

Might we be tempted to despair at times and not necessarily find joy in all circumstances? Absolutely. But, as Habakkuk said, "God, the Lord, is my strength" (18). Time and time again our own strength might give out before getting us all the way to the "rejoicing" part. But, in Christ, we are joined to the source of infinite and everlasting strength, constant and sustaining through all circumstances.

So, like Habakkuk, may we rejoice in the Lord. And, when we feel weak and powerless, may we proclaim, "God, the Lord, is my strength!"

# NOVEMBER 30

*Zephaniah 1:7*



**S**ILENCE. IT'S AN INTERESTING CONCEPT, ISN'T IT? WE OFTEN THINK OF SILENCE AS BEING ASSOCIATED WITH SOMETHING BAD.

Maybe you told your children to be silent as a punishment (or because you just couldn't take their talking anymore), or maybe silence to you is a sign of negativity from a relationship, a la the silence of a significant other can often mean something is wrong. We usually don't value silence enough, if even at all, although it seems to be a pretty straightforward command in this passage.

How often are you silent before the Lord? In a world of chaos, confusion, and constant turmoil & business, we often find ourselves silent at the times we should talk and talking when it would do us more good to be silent. After a long day, it's easy to be silent at the dinner table when it would be better to inquire about how each of your family member's days were, but during prayer, we often move straight to asking God for things and never spend anytime silent before him, meditating on the truth of Scripture.

Today, let's reverse the course with that. Be involved where you need to be involved, but be submissive where you need to be submissive. Yes, ask the Lord for things in prayer. He wants to hear from you. But let's learn to be silent and let's learn to meditate on the wondrous truth of a Savior that came to save sinners like you and me.

# DECEMBER 1

*Zephaniah 1:12*



**T**HE LORD REALLY DOES CARE ABOUT OUR ACTIONS. HE IS NOT COMPLACENT.

Have you ever thought that about a situation you were or are in? Before I was a believer, I thought I was one. I had made a decision to follow Jesus but there was no real heart or life change that accompanied it, and it was clear from a theological perspective that I was not an authentic believer in Jesus.

After God saved me and I became a Christian, I began to see all of the evil thoughts that I had inherently believed about God from my days as being a church going non-believer. I had some terrible theological beliefs that needed rooted out of my heart and mind if I was going to progress and follow Jesus. One of those thoughts that needed rooted out of my life was the thought that God really didn't care about what I did morally in my life. I believed in the old adage, "once saved, always saved," and while I still believe in that, I believe in it in a different way. No longer is eternal security a license to sin, but it is empowered by the gospel that saved me and empowers me to pursue holiness.

What do you believe? Do you think God really cares about your actions today? Take heed and submit to Scripture from Zephaniah 1:12. God really does care about your actions and he is not silent, he is not passive, and he is not unaware. Run to Jesus today and trust him with your life, and let the power of the gospel empower you towards holiness and away from sin.

# DECEMBER 2

*Haggai 1:1-5*



**H**AGGAI PICKS UP FROM EZRA 1 WHEN THE CHILDREN OF GOD WERE RETURNING TO JERUSALEM FROM EXILE.

Over 10 years goes by of neglecting the temple reconstruction until God speaks through Haggai to start rebuilding again. Here God asks his people to, “Consider your ways.” We would do well to do the same. What has your time, energy, affections, funds, and joy above God?

The people saw hard times to mean that it must not be the right time to rebuild. When times are tough, rather than staying faithful to what God has said and our responsibilities, do we retreat from commitment and run to comfort? How often do you say, “When things slow down at work. When the kids get older. After things settle down, then I’ll help.” Unfortunately, then usually never comes. What is the *then* in your life that is keeping you from serving God today? Until then happens, other things constantly bid for top priority.

The hard times faded and the mission of rebuilding the temple was never top priority again. During these years, the people began to finish houses, but it wasn’t God’s, it was their own (4). Consider how much of your life is actively seeking God’s glory by investing in his mission rather than your own glory and comfort.

Learn from the mistakes of others, and make God-honoring decisions today. They were in exile because of unfaithfulness. They’re starting over again and God is calling them to not make the same mistakes their fathers made.

If God isn’t top priority to you today, repent to God. He forgives and grants wisdom. Re-prioritize your life, and commit to faithfully serve him. He is worthy.

# DECEMBER 3

*Haggai 1:12*



**A** GREAT MYTH TODAY IS THAT OUR SIN IS AN ISOLATED SITUATION THAT DOESN'T AFFECT ANYONE ELSE.

We are prone to believe the lie that “what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas” works with our internet browsers, job responsibilities, family and marriage, our church, etc. The sin of God’s chosen people, and the circumstances around them, were being seen as separate events. God’s people were not obeying him.

They saw the circumstances around them as a reason for disobedience, yet it was the very means of grace that God was using to get their attention. Times of drought aren’t times to turn from God and abandon your post. Rather, they are times to trust and walk faithfully to God.

Often times, we believe that tough external circumstances are valid reasons to sin. Certainly they are times where temptation seems more appealing to us as an exit door to peace. However, those are times we need to be aware of, to plan for, and stay the course through.

Consider the effects of sin from Adam and Eve, Achan, David, and Ananias and Sapphira. Compare these verses with Haggai 1:6-11. These all brought death and ruin to themselves and others. Sin doesn’t happen in a vacuum; it has consequences that affect many people.

We serve a Sovereign God who loves his glory and people so much that he does whatever it takes to get our attention and affections off ourselves and our sin, and onto joyful service and worship of him. All of life’s circumstances are being used by God to form you more into the image of Jesus. Droughts call for self-examination, repentance when necessary, and faithful obedience.

# DECEMBER 4

*Haggai 1:12-15*



**G**OD'S PEOPLE TURNED FROM THEIR DISOBEDIENCE AND BEGAN DOING THE WORK THAT GOD HAD ORIGINALLY CALLED THEM TO, WHICH WAS TO REBUILD THE TEMPLE.

They put God back as top priority and began to walk in obedience to him. We live in a culture that doesn't value the God of the Bible and his ways. Regardless of the consequences it may bring, it is always best to obey God. The Bible is God's revelation of himself to us, and as such, we should long to know him more dearly through consistent study and meditation of it. In it we find what pleases God and what doesn't please him. I want to please my wife, my kids, my boss, and my friends. How much more should we desire to please God!

Here in Haggai, the people's prior disobedience brought upon them curses from God that was evidenced in their crops. Their obedience now is bringing upon them the blessings of God. Reflect on your life. How much does it obey Scripture? Are there areas that you need to begin walking in obedience? Are there areas that you need to grow in and trust God with? If so, begin today. Not to earn favor from God or treat him like a genie in a bottle to bless you on command, but to simply please the one who saved you.

Whatever your circumstances, you can trust your situation is in the best hands possible, by walking in faithful obedience to God's Word. This doesn't mean that every day will be trouble free, but you can face the day, as verse 13 says, knowing that God is with you. God is with you! When you live for him, he walks with you. What a blessing.



# DECEMBER 5

*Haggai 2:1-9*



**T**HE IDEA OF WORK IS USUALLY MET WITH A SENSE OF FRUSTRATION, UNHAPPINESS AND DISSATISFACTION.

Whether it's from the type of work you do or the people you're around, it's not often met with joy. You may have even heard people say they're waiting for a *real* job to finally come.

Well, according to God, all jobs are real. Companies are run by sinful people, and yet work is still a good thing. Back in the Garden of Eden, God commanded the man, "work and keep the garden." God created work. This is also before sin entered the world, so we know that the idea of working is good and God ordained. We find this simple truth in Haggai 2:1-9.

God is the one who modeled work in the creation account in Genesis. Work and rest. God is the one who, "gives us the ability to produce wealth" in Deuteronomy 8. In Colossians 3 we are instructed that, "whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men ..." So whatever skills, talents, and abilities you have, you are to use them to glorify God as a good worker. Are you a good worker? Do you work heartily? Are you working as if Jesus himself is your boss that you report to daily? Do you serve your employees and superiors with a loving heart? When you do, it's good work that is honoring God.

Work to the best of your ability, with a serving heart, and you can rest assure that God is with you in it. The Holy Spirit doesn't wait for you in the parking lot of your work. He's with you. Your work is a testimony to the character of God to those around you. God's people committed to doing the work, and the blessing is that God was with them. He's with you, too, so go do good work!

# DECEMBER 6

*Haggai 2:10-19*



**I**N THE MIDST OF THIS RUINED LAND, GOD IS ABOUT TO BRING AGRICULTURAL REVIVAL.

God previously prevented his people's crops from growing because of their sin. Now they're obeying God and in a position to receive God's provision. Just as disobedience brought the curse, so their obedience is bringing a blessing. It would be in the form of agriculture.

Is the seed yet in the barn? The rhetorical answer is, "no," it's all been used up and there is no sign of any crops producing this year. God had withheld the rains and produce from the land, which now leaves them agriculturally ruined. This year and next year are now dead. Are there areas of your life that seem ruined? In your life, has a drought caused death in any areas? Is there a seemingly hopeless situation that you find yourself in? If so, there's hope.

God is about to bring a crop to yield in a way that cannot be explained other than God is good and nothing is too difficult for him. In the dead areas of your life, preach to yourself like David did in Psalm 42, "Why are you downcast, O my soul ... Hope in God." Nothing is too difficult for God, too far that his hand can't reach, nor any sin too great that his grace isn't greater than.

God wants you to trust him. Looking at the bare trees they cannot determine if they will yield fruit again. God can, and does. He tells them "from this day on" he'll bless them and their fields. In our times of drought and despair may we stand on the promises of God. We can trust him as a faithful God that can revive a harvest.

What areas do you need to trust God for a harvest? Apart from him we can do nothing, but with him, all things are possible.

# DECEMBER 7

*Zechariah 1:1-6*



**H**ERE WE SEE THE HEART OF GOD. HIS HEART IS ONE THAT DESIRES FOR PEOPLE TO TURN TO HIM AND BE RECONCILED TO HIM.

This call to return, to repent, is a call that is echoed all throughout the pages of Scripture (Isaiah 30:15; Matthew 3:8; Luke 24:47; Acts 20:21). There is a heavy weight to this call, as should be, as one's repentance bears eternal consequences.

To every human, repentance means we realize that we have turned from God and are under God's wrath. To repent from sin, by faith in the finished work of Jesus, is to turn back to God. You go from a child of wrath to a child of God. This is salvation.

To a Christian now, you are to repent of sin as you become aware of it and to continually put your faith in Jesus (1 John 1:9). This is not something to be taken lightly. As we grow in our love for God we should equally grow in our hate for sin. As we become more aware of our own wandering hearts away from God and towards sin, may we be all the more in awe of God's grace to bring us back to himself by the cross of Christ.

In Zechariah, God's people (and their fathers) were not taking sin seriously. God had just delivered them from exile and they were already sinning against God. We should tremble at the thought of God's judgment. Do you tremble at how God has executed judgment in the pages of Scripture? Do you tremble at the thought of an angry God towards you (2)? How gracious an offer for God to forgive when repentant sinners turn to him.

If there's sin in your life that you have not repented of, ask Jesus to forgive now. Take a moment and reflect on the many ways God's been gracious towards you.

# DECEMBER 8

*Zechariah 1:7-17*



**G**OD'S DESIRE IS FOR HIS GLORY TO BE ON DISPLAY IN HIS TEMPLE AGAIN, FOR HIS CITY TO BE A BEACON TO THE NATIONS FOR SALVATION, AND FOR HIS PEOPLE TO BE OUT FROM UNDER OPPRESSION (15).

The glory of God in the temple had left before exile (over 70 years ago) as told in Ezekiel 10, and God was ready to return to his temple. The only problem was that he didn't have a temple to return to, thus the order to rebuild the temple.

God had not forgotten about his people. Though they were going through a tough exile, they were not forgotten by God. We need to also remember that just because we may not see or know what God is doing doesn't mean that he has forgotten about us. Here we see that God is exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem. He is much like the father who sees his prodigal son on the horizon and is overjoyed at his return (Luke 15).

Chapters 1 and 2, like the entire book, are full of visions. The visions in these two chapters are recalling God's sovereign hand over the nations he used to refine his people. God is also speaking of mercy and restoration (16-17) for his people. These are both real events that happened then, as well as shadows of what would be fulfilled in Jesus later.

God, like a loving father, wants to display his love and grace to the world through his children. God is worthy and deserving to be praised. He has brought mercy and restoration to us. As God's presence in the temple was evident to the world and brought about worship to him and joy to his people, so God's presence in our life is to be evident to the world and bring about worship to him and joy to us.

# DECEMBER 9

*Zechariah 3:1-10*



**F**OR OUR SAKE HE MADE HIM TO BE SIN WHO KNEW NO SIN, SO THAT IN HIM WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD" (2 CORINTHIANS 5:21).

This is perhaps one of the most beautiful and powerful images of the doctrine of justification: to be legally and permanently declared forgiven of sin, and declared righteous and pleasing before God. This is a picture of Joshua getting his filthy coat exchanged for a pure coat.

What a crazy reality to the Christian. The holy and just God of the universe not only created you, but when you sinned, he paid the full penalty for your sin on the cross through Jesus. He exchanged his righteousness for your filthiness. The next time you sing "Amazing Grace," think on this beloved doctrine.

In this picture, Joshua, like all humans, is standing before God with filthy sin (Romans 3:23). We are guilty before a holy God, deserving of God's justice. When Satan accuses us of our sin we can only accept it as true and worthy of justice. Yet, by his mercy, God's people don't get what they deserve. Instead, by his grace we get what we don't deserve, namely Jesus' righteousness. Completely undeserving and unearned. Completely of God's doing and not our own (4). When you ask Jesus to forgive you of your sin, you now stand forgiven and justified before God. When Satan (or anyone else) now accuses you of forgiven sin, you can plead the blood of Jesus and have confidence in your standing before God (Romans 8:1).

Justification is a legal transaction that takes place and has no court of appeals, thus our foundation is firm to stand on.

# DECEMBER 10

*Zechariah 4:1-14*



**W**HATEVER GOD DECLARES WILL BE, WE CAN REST ASSURED IT WILL COME TO PASS.

Just as God restored his people's crops in Haggai 1, God is going to restore his temple. He's going to do it through his people, but by his Spirit.

The temple reconstruction was halted previously due to mighty opposition. The temple was destroyed by a mighty army. The temple would take physical might to lay a foundation and build the walls again. By might, God's people were removed from Jerusalem, and the temple was destroyed. Now, by the Spirit, God is returning and restoring his people and temple. Though the temple would be built with human hands, it would be brought about by the Holy Spirit. God used Cyrus to release his people to return to Jerusalem. God revived the hearts of his people to rebuild the temple by the Spirit (Ezra 5:2). Here, again by the Spirit, he will finish his temple reconstruction (vs. 9).

God does not need any of us to bring about what he wants. He could've spoken the temple into existence if he wanted to, but he didn't, He's using his people to accomplish his plan. God, in his kindness, allows us to be a part of his story of redemption here on earth. May this humble us to know that God doesn't need us, and encourage us because he chooses to use us.

Just as God is restoring the temple by his Spirit, he is also restoring you by his Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18). What areas of your life need rebuilding? Where are you operating out of your own might versus his Spirit? Battling sin, dependent upon your might, brings defeat. You must depend upon the Spirit for victory. Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).

# DECEMBER 11

*Zechariah 6:9-15*



**A**S WE'VE SEEN ALREADY IN ZECHARIAH, THE FORESHADOWING OF JESUS' COMING CONTINUES TO GET STRONGER AND MORE SPECIFIC.

This is an amazing book to read and see quoted particularly throughout the Gospels and book of Revelation.

In today's verses, Jesus (the branch) is both the foundation and the founder of this temple and his church. This current temple was a foreshadowing as well to the church that Jesus would begin (1 Timothy 3:15; Matthew 16:18; 2 Corinthians 6:16). Joshua and Zerubbabel are both foreshadows of a future Savior to come. They are both pointing to a single person fulfilling the roles of priest and king, which is Jesus (Revelation 1:5).

As prophet, he came calling people to repent and offers forgiveness to those that do. As priest, he offered himself as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind. As king, he rules and reigns with all authority.

Zechariah is one of the most quoted Old Testament books in the New Testament. Through Zechariah, we see almost 30 prophecies about the coming Messiah. Take time this week, and with a notepad, read chapters 9-14, looking at the different ways God prophesied that Messiah would come and was fulfilled in Jesus. I hope you see the anticipation, the Old Testament looked forward to, joy in how it was fulfilled in Jesus, and excitement about his soon return.

Zechariah looks forward to the day "The LORD will be king over all the earth" (14:9). Jesus will make all things new. He will right every wrong. He will, once and for all, dispose of sin and death. Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He rules and reigns over all creation for all of eternity. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

# DECEMBER 12

## *Malachi 1*



**M**ALACHI IS A MESSENGER THAT IS CAUGHT BETWEEN A BACK AND FORTH PING PONG OF ARGUMENTS WITH GOD AND HIS PEOPLE.

It's insane to think that this could happen, and that God would put up with such disdain. Perhaps you're not too far off from them. Have you ever questioned God's love, goodness, or seemingly lack of care? The antidote to these is trusting in the character of God.

God's people were sinning and thus being deceived and growing hard hearted (Hebrews 3:13). Their hard hearts were on display in many ways in Malachi. Notice how today's reading focuses on their questioning his love for them and neglecting God's worth. God gives two relationship examples that display their hearts.

**1. A father and son:** As a son naturally wants to honor his father, so father God deserves to be honored by his children. Your love for God is made evident by your glad sacrifices for him. They were offering lame leftovers (7) to God and thinking that it was a great sacrifice. God's response was that he had "no pleasure in" them and "will not accept an offering" from them (10).

**2. A master and servant:** Even in a working relationship there is a mutual understanding of responsibility and honor due to position. God challenges them to take their offering to their governor and see if he'll accept it. If he won't, then how much more will God not?

God knows his value and worth. It is us who constantly forget it or minimize it. God is a great father whom we should aim to please as our provider and protector. He is also a great king who is worthy of our service and praise.

Reflect on how you can better honor God as father and please him as a great king.



# DECEMBER 13

## *Malachi 2*



**R**ATHER THAN REPENTING OF SIN, GOD'S PEOPLE ARE WEeping AND GROANING AT THE ALTAR BECAUSE GOD ISN'T PLEASED WITH THEIR LIVES.

They think God should conform to their standards rather than them conform to God's. Today's culture tells you to "do whatever makes you happy. You are your own number one priority." The world calling for others to serve you is in opposition of God's calling to serve others (Mark 10:45). How much of your time is spent serving others? What can you do today to serve someone? Who is in your life that is hard to serve that you need to stay committed to?

Our worship is displeasing when we are faithless to God or people. Malachi connects faithlessness to one another directly to God. Therefore, faithlessness to one another is faithlessness to God. Faithlessness to your local church, family, job, and friends is a worship issue. Don't leave your commitment for the sake of convenience or pleasure.

Israel's two sins of faithlessness:

**1. Marriage to daughters of foreign gods:** Marriage outside the faith family of God is not in line with Scripture (2 Corinthians 6:14) and is a sin. This is unfaithful to God. With divorce as prevalent as it is today, it should drive us to more carefully consider who we are considering marrying in the first place. If you're dating, have God's purposes for marriage at the center of your relationship.

**2. Divorcing their Jewish wives:** The marriage commitments were pleasing to God and looked forward to the blessed fruit of children. Their faithlessness was not reflective of God as a faithful, covenant keeping father.

God is always faithful to his promises. How is your faithfulness to your promises?

# DECEMBER 14

*Malachi 3:1-5*



**M**ALACHI SHOWS US THAT GOD NOT SURPRISED BY ANY SITUATION.

People describe the ebb and flow of life as a roller coaster ride. There are ups and downs. God's people were going through hard times here. They are wondering why God would allow hard times to happen. Have you ever wondered why God would allow difficult times?

God is sovereign over good and bad times, and brings about his glory and your good through the refining process. We want to be pure gold, but without the refining. We would do well to grow in trusting our lives in the hands of our refining God.

All people live in the same broken world. You don't need a change of circumstances; you need a change of perspective. To the non-Christian, God is being patient and calling you to repent (2 Peter 3:9). The fire He brings will be one of judgement (5). To the Christian, God is working sin out of you by those times. This is the refining process. The refining fire of God is not the fires of hell to a believer. In Christ, your worst circumstances are being used by God to purify you.

Your circumstances are the heat of life that God is using to refine you into the image of Jesus (Romans 8:28). Circumstances always reveal your heart. You can't blame God and others for the sin in your heart. The refining process calls this dross. God puts you through his fiery furnace to draw out the dross, which purifies you. Though it hurts, it brings holiness.

Don't be mad at situations. Instead, fix your eyes on Jesus and trust his refiner's fire. Don't ask to get out of the heat, but let it have its perfect work in you.

# DECEMBER 15

*Malachi 3:6-12*



**H**ERE, GOD IS CALLING HIS PEOPLE TO RETURN TO HIM THROUGH STEWARDSHIP - NAMELY THEIR TITHES AND OFFERINGS. THEY WERE ROBBING GOD BY NOT GIVING TO GOD WHAT WAS DUE HIM.

Stewardship is the use of your life under the authority of God, and in obedience with Scripture. God owns everything (Psalms 24:1). Therefore, you are not the owner of anything. Stewardship is how you use the things God has entrusted in your care. Don't believe the lie that you own what you have. From people to possessions, you are merely a steward of them. Not only are you responsible for how you care for and use them, but you are also accountable to God - the true owner. This fact puts a tremendous weight on the way you should steward your life.

Does your parenting reflect you being a good steward of your children? What about your house, friendships, work, finances, schedule, etc.? God's Word addresses these issues and more (2 Peter 1:3). Spend time today thinking about how you are stewarding your time, talent, and treasure. Is it bringing God honor through obedience to the Bible? If not, heed the call here in Malachi, and return to God through repentance and obedience.

Disobedience in finances to the LORD was another reason God's people had bad crops. God promised their land would be blessed and a delight if they began giving to the ministry (11). With the temple rebuilt, the stage was set to be a beacon of the gospel to the nations. When God's people are good stewards with their lives, the nations will take notice (12) and his gospel will be spread throughout the world.

# DECEMBER 16

*Malachi 3:13-4:3*



**G**OD'S PEOPLE ARE QUESTIONING WHETHER OR NOT IT IS WORTH IT TO REPENT TO GOD.

They are looking around and seeing that there are people who don't love God, who are doing evil, and who are seemingly getting away with it (15). Why should they be required to repent of sin?

These people are judging the heart by the external situation. God judges the heart regardless of the situation. In our lives, let this be a warning to not look to repentance as a means to gain *stuff*. The motive of repentance should be to acknowledge the truth of God's holiness, your sinfulness, and need for his forgiveness. Repentance is a means of getting God, not stuff.

The people are going through hard times. Perhaps you are going through hard times, too. It's during those hard times that God is exposing your heart. You can have an unrepentant heart during easy times or hard times. The situation isn't the problem, it's the posture of your heart towards God. Repentance restores your love for God and for people.

Repentance is such a gift. God gives you the means and ability to turn from your sin and towards him. This gives insight into the heart of God. God wants to be with you and you with him (17).

The struggle of living in a sin filled world, with a sin stained heart, will one day be over (4:1-3). Daily repentance is taking steps of returning to God. It looks forward to the day when you are no longer turning from him and towards him anymore, but standing with him. Repentance seeks the presence of the person, not gifts from his hands.

Do you view repentance as a gift of grace? How often do you repent? What are you hoping to get when you repent?

# DECEMBER 17

*Malachi 4:4-5*



**W**E SEE THROUGH THE PAGES OF THE BIBLE, AS WELL AS HISTORY, THAT FAMILY DYSFUNCTION RUNS RAMPANT.

God's design is for man to work hard, to love and protect his wife, and to raise a godly family (Genesis 1:28; 2:5; 18; 24). After the Ten Commandments are given, God gives specific instructions to the men, ensuring discipleship through family would continue (Deuteronomy 6:1-9). What does he say? Teach your kids about father God during every waking moment - At meal time, walking around, bedside, etc. Every moment is an opportunity as a father to tell your kids about father God.

Since the Garden of Eden it's been a chaotic family mess that sin has affected. Yet through it all, God is a faithful father and enables godly men to also be faithful fathers.

Much of the Old Testament is a constant call to not be like your fathers that turned from God. Christians, "were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers" (1 Peter 1:18). We cannot let our earthly father dictate how God the father is. We must look to the Bible to see who God the father is, and out of being his child, we can then begin to father in a godly way. There is a huge gap of fatherhood that you can begin ministry in today. Pray for ways to minister as a father, beginning with your own family, and begin taking steps towards reflecting father God better. Practically, work, don't leave, read the bible, pray and play together, protect, teach, etc.

God is calling you to love him as father, to love your kids, and to leave a godly legacy behind of how great God is.

*This passage of Scripture is specifically geared towards fathers; it does not devalue in any way the role of mothers.*

# DECEMBER 18

BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS: *Persians*



**T**HE TIME BETWEEN MALACHI'S LAST PROPHECIES AND THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF JOHN THE BAPTIST'S BIRTH IS OFTEN DESCRIBED AS THE INTERTESTAMENTAL (OR "BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS") PERIOD.

Because there were no recognized prophets speaking on behalf of God, this four century segment of history is sometimes referred to as the "silent years." From the time of Malachi until the coming of Alexander in 332 B.C., the Persians were too concerned with political infighting at home. Consequently, the Jewish people were permitted to practice their religion with little interference.

We have to remember that the delivering of God's Word and biblical miracles were never the norm of history. If you list the recorded miracles of the Bible, more than 90% of them are in 3 specific time periods of 40 years each: during the time of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Jesus and his apostles. The Bible records human history from the beginning of time, yet over 90% of the miracles occur during a 120-year period? Why?

Could it be that God spoke through miracles during times when he wanted to authenticate the delivery of his Word? The time of Moses was God's first written revelation of himself through the Torah. The time of Elijah and Elisha's miracles authenticated the chief of the prophets during the prophetic period. And the time of Christ and his apostles represent the giving of the New Testament. Outside of those specific time periods, there aren't many supernatural miracles listed over the rest of the 6000 years of human history.

God is still in the miracle-working business. Read John 3:1-21 for the greatest miracle God performs as he changes the human heart.

# DECEMBER 19

BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS: *Greeks*



**A**S ALEXANDER THE GREAT MOVED FROM GREECE TOWARD PERSIA IN 332 B.C., HE BROUGHT HIS ARMY DOWN THE MEDITERRANEAN COAST, CONQUERING EVERY ARMY IN HIS PATH.

Wisely, the Jewish people decided that instead of fighting against Alexander, they would support him because the prophet Daniel had prophesied with much specificity that the Persians would someday be overcome by the Greeks (Daniel 7:6; 8:5-8, 20-22). Fighting against Alexander would be fighting against God. Ancient historian Josephus writes that when Jaddua, the high priest, went to meet Alexander, he was greeted warmly, and Alexander honored God and saluted Jaddua. The Greeks were greatly surprised, but as Josephus records, Alexander replied, that he had a dream while still in Macedonia, in which he gave the high priest his right hand, and went into the temple and “offered sacrifice to God according to the high priest’s direction.” Alexander made a treaty with the Jews where they could continue to worship God according to the Torah and exempted them from the payment of tribute.

Alexander spread his rule from Europe to India and beyond, making it a point to instruct all nations in the language and customs of the Greeks. The entire western world learned a common language. The New Testament authors, though most shared the mother tongue of Hebrew, chose to pen their gospel message in the one language that most of the world understood. Alexander had paved the way for the gospel to be heard in the uttermost parts of the earth.

Pray today for our national and international leaders. Remember that God can use whomever he chooses to accomplish his purposes on earth. Read Romans 13:1-14.

# DECEMBER 20

*BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS: The “Hidden” Books*



**M**ANYTIMES, PEOPLE WILL FIND OLD FAMILY BIBLES THAT INCLUDE BOOKS NOT FOUND IN MOST PROTESTANT BIBLES. THESE BOOKS ARE FORMALLY CALLED THE APOCRYPHA WHICH MEANS “HIDDEN.”

Written during the latter half of the intertestamental period, approximately 180 B.C. – 50 B.C., the Jews respected the historical value of these books, but did not view these writings on par with the books contained in the Jewish Bible or Old Testament.

It wasn't until the Council of Trent, in 1548, when the Roman Catholic Church officially recognized the Apocrypha as Scripture. Early protestants refused to do so for a number of reasons. First, although Jesus and his apostles regularly quoted from the Old Testament, they never directly quote a passage from these additional books. Second, when Jesus speaks of Old Testament martyrs and prophets (Luke 11:51), he only includes the time frame from Abel to Zechariah (Zechariah being around the same era as Malachi). The apocryphal books were written well over two centuries after the latter prophets. Third, when Jesus described how the entire Old Testament spoke of him, he referenced the law, the prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:44) but made no reference any of the extra books.

The Apostle Peter writes, “knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21). The apocryphal books do not meet the recognized standard of the 66 books in the Bible. The only books that have been included are the ones by which we can quote and say with surety, “thus saith the Lord.”



# DECEMBER 21

*BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS: History of Hanukkah*



**A**FTER ALEXANDER'S DEATH IN 323 B.C., HIS KINGDOM WAS DIVIDED, AS DANIEL HAD PREDICTED, INTO FOUR KINGDOMS UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF HIS FOUR MAIN GENERALS.

Seleucus and his family ruled the geographical area that contained Israel. Though Seleucus and most of his descendants followed the example of Alexander and gave the Jews self-rule, in 168 B.C., Antiochus IV Epiphanes outlawed the Jewish religion and ordered the Jews to worship his pagan gods. When they refused, he sent his armies into Jerusalem, killing thousands of people and desecrating the temple by erecting an altar to Zeus and sacrificing pigs.

Judah, known as Judah Maccabee ("the Hammer"), led a rebellion and defeated the Greek armies, relying largely on "terrorist" activities. Judah called on his followers to cleanse the second temple, rebuild its altar, and light its menorah - the gold candelabrum whose seven branches represented knowledge and creation.

Even though only enough kosher olive oil to keep the menorah's candles burning for a one day, the flames stayed lit for eight nights. By the end of that time, they had time to find more oil and began cleansing the temple. It is for this reason that Jews to this day celebrate Hanukkah, the festival of lights. The celebration lasts for eight days in December, the same time of year they fought off armies of Antiochus Epiphanes IV.

Though the story of Hanukkah does not appear in the Bible, the celebration of the holiday is included in the New Testament as the "feast of dedication" or the "festival of lights." Read John 10 to see Jesus celebrating this holiday. While we don't celebrate Hanukkah, how can you celebrate God's protection and guidance today?

# DECEMBER 22

*BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS: The Rise of Rome*



**T**HE MACCABEE FAMILY RULED IN JUDEA FOR THE NEXT 100 YEARS. AS THE GREEK EMPIRE DECLINED, ANOTHER GREAT POWER AROSE IN THE WEST.

Daniel predicted this army of iron, as the Romans began to consolidate power and rule over Europe. Under the leadership of Julius Caesar, the armies of Rome began to toward the middle east and Egypt.

Although the Romans conquered Judea in 63 B.C., there continued to be a few decades of unrest in the area. In 40 B.C. the Roman Senate appointed Herod, a well-connected descendant of an Edomite family, to be King of the Jews. He was charged by the Roman Senate to maintain order in the region. Herod converted to a form of Judaism that he had studied over the years, but because of his Idumean descent, the Jews would not accept him. As a result, Herod became a ruthless dictator.

In an effort to demonstrate his commitment to Judaism, Herod began building a temple in Jerusalem that would become one of the wonders of the world. He employed over 1,000 priests as masons and carpenters. The building project was of such a massive scale that the building of the temple went on long after his death.

Herod also built one of the greatest harbors in the Mediterranean region, and named it Caesarea, as an effort to win favor with the new Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus. This port would serve as a major point for travel for many of Jesus' disciples. With new roads to reach the world quickly, and with a common language for the first time since the tower of Babel, there had never been a better time for the gospel to spread to the uttermost part of the earth.

Read Galatians 4:4-5. Pray today for God to use our times to reach the world.

*Every Single Day* 2018 will begin on December 23, 2017 with the events leading up to the birth of Christ in Matthew.



## *Thank You, Contributors*



C. J. Adkins  
Mason Ballard  
Molly Ballard  
Will Basham  
Jeremy Berry  
Raymond Bouchoc  
Travis Edwards  
Adam Goodwin  
Bill Henard  
Chatto Hill  
Todd Hill  
Andy Honeycutt  
Jason McClanahan  
Luke Miller  
Ryan Navy  
Cleve Persinger  
Katie Persinger  
Seth Polk  
Chris Priestley  
Danny Rumble  
Aaron Sligar  
Randy Spurgeon  
Allan Thompson  
Jason Trautwein  
Tim Turner  
Tim Valentine  
Steve Willis





