

NEW 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*

DEDICATION

Every Single Day



AT THE 2016 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WEST VIRGINIA CONVENTION OF SOUTHERN BAPTISTS, CONVENTION PRESIDENT RON MCCOY, DURING HIS PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS, DECLARED, "THERE'S NO REASON WEST VIRGINIA CANNOT BE THE EPICENTER OF REVIVAL IN OUR NATION."

A part of seeing this revival take place is when God's people connect every single day with God's Word.

This year's devotional is dedicated to three individuals who passed away and went on to be with the Lord in the past year, including Ron, who were instrumental in developing and encouraging the spiritual and missional climate of West Virginia:

- **Ron McCoy** served as President of the Convention and as Director of Missions for the Upper Ohio Valley Baptist Association.
- **David Mellquist** served as Director of Missions for the Monongahela Baptist Association.
- **Shirley Finley** served as a member of the WVCSB Executive Board and was instrumental in missions education and promotion throughout West Virginia.

May God's Spirit be poured out on us *every single day*.

- *West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists*

DECEMBER 23

Matthew 1:1



HAVE YOU EVER HAD A RELATIONSHIP WITH SOMEONE WHO WAS 100% RELIABLE? SOMEONE WHO HAS NEVER LET YOU DOWN?

How about someone who has always been completely truthful with you? Or never wrong? The fact is that no one is perfect in keeping their promises but the Bible goes out of its way to demonstrate that God always keeps his Word. In fact, even though God is all-powerful there is one thing he cannot do. He cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

God does not have the ability to act outside of his character. If he promises to do something we can be sure that it will happen because he never lies as the sovereign Lord over all creation, he has the power to ensure that it will happen.

In the Old Testament, we see God making two prominent promises to Abraham and David. He promised Abraham that he would (1) give his physical descendants permanent possession of the Holy Land, (2) that he would bless those descendants and (3) that people who blessed his descendants would be blessed and people who cursed his offspring would be cursed. God also promised that through Abraham's seed (singular) the entire world would be blessed.

In 2 Samuel 7, God promises David that one of his descendants would rule over Israel forever and that the Jewish people would someday live in the promised land and be disturbed by their enemies no more.

It's no accident that Matthew begins his gospel with these words, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). Matthew is sending the signal that every sentence in his letter is there to demonstrate how God is in the process of fulfilling his promises to Abraham and David through the God-Man, Christ Jesus.

DECEMBER 24

Matthew 1:18-25



WE OFTEN SPEAK OF THE GREAT MIRACLE BY WHICH JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD AS THE VIRGIN BIRTH, THOUGH WE SHOULD PERHAPS SPEAK INSTEAD OF THE VIRGIN CONCEPTION.

Jesus' birth into this world was actually quite natural and normal. However, Jesus' conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary was supernatural—the work of the Holy Spirit alone in Mary. Just as God's Spirit was at work when God created the world when there was nothing, so too God's Spirit created something from nothing in Mary's womb in the beginning of the gospel. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that before Mary was married to Joseph, she was “found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit” (1:18). And this miracle changes everything!

The virgin conception means that Jesus was not simply a holy man who became a god. It also means that Jesus was not an otherworldly ghost who just appeared to be a man with a lot of good things to teach us. The virgin conception means that the baby born to Mary, Jesus of Nazareth, was fully God and fully human at the same time, yet without sin. As fully human Jesus is able to go to the cross in our place, as our substitute, to pay the penalty that our sin deserves. As fully God Jesus' death and resurrection constitute the victory of God over sin, death, and the devil. The Christmas miracle is God's ultimate answer to all the evil, injustice, and suffering that we see around us.

The virgin conception also tells us something significant about our salvation. Our salvation is entirely by grace without human effort. God takes the initiative apart from any human effort to send us Jesus who will save us from our sins. What a miracle!

DECEMBER 25

Matthew 2:1-12



WHAT WAS THE BEST GIFT YOU RECEIVED TODAY? DID THE GIFTS YOU RECEIVED TELL YOU SOMETHING ABOUT HOW OTHERS PERCEIVE YOU?

How about the gifts you gave to others? What did your gift communicate about your love for them?

In Matthew 2 we see the wise men coming to present baby Jesus with gifts. Each tells us a little about how these men valued the Christ Child.

Gold was a gift fit for a king. As the ancient world's most precious metal, a gift of gold signified that you recognized someone was most valuable. Gold demonstrated that someone had the right to rule.

Frankincense, a form of incense, was an expensive gift used in worship. In Judaism, incense was used to anoint the priests of Israel and was part of the ceremonial praise offering to God. This gift was a sign recognizing that Jesus was born to be a priest. It may even have demonstrated this child deserved their worship.

Myrrh was a peculiar gift to give a newborn. Myrrh was an incredibly costly ointment that was used for embalming the most affluent after their death. Whereas giving Jesus gold signified that he came to rule, and frankincense symbolized that he would become our great high priest, myrrh demonstrated that this child was born to die. As Gentiles, how would the Magi (the Wise Men) know that this was the destiny of the baby Jesus?

These men would have been familiar with Old Testament prophecies. The Messiah would be a king (2 Samuel 7) and that the Messiah would be a great high priest (Psalm 110, Zechariah. 6). But Isaiah 53 gives an even more explicit account of how the Messiah, through death, would bear our sins and serve as the suffering Savior of us all. The Magi knew who Jesus was the same way we can: by studying the Scriptures. What gift will you give Jesus today?

DECEMBER 26

Matthew 1:2-17



GOD CAN USE ANYONE TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL.
HIS GRACE IS GREATER THAN ALL OUR SINS.

Matthew highlights four women spanning the ancestral line of Abraham to Mary and Joseph. Think of all the godly women that could have been included in this list—yet Matthew chose only four.

Tamar (1:3) entered the royal bloodline by posing as a prostitute and secretly tricking her father-in-law into getting her pregnant (Genesis 38). Who was that father-in-law? Judah, son of Jacob and great-grandson of Abraham, the head of the largest tribe of Israel. Jesus is known as the Lion of Judah as a result of that illicit affair.

Rahab (1:4) didn't have to pose as a prostitute, she really was one (and a Canaanite, no less!). One can only imagine her original motive for inviting Joshua and Caleb to her apartment while the people of Jericho searched desperately for the hidden spies. Through her interactions with them, her heart turned to faith (Hebrews 11:31).

Ruth is probably the least disreputable of the four women, but her place is conspicuous as well. Ruth came from the Moabite people, an incestuous group that were forbidden from intermarrying with faithful Jews. The Moabites were known for child-sacrifice and worshipping the most violent of gods. Yet here is this woman who renounced her heritage, demonstrated extreme loyalty to her Jewish mother-in-law, and fell into the arms the man who would become King David's great-grandfather, Boaz.

Bathsheba, the adulterous wife of Uriah, came to Jesus' lineage through a series of events that culminated in the murder of her husband at the order of King David. In all of the Hebrew Bible, the story of David and Bathsheba is probably the most scandalous.

If God can use these four ladies with their challenging pasts, we can be assured that he can still use all of us.

DECEMBER 27

Matthew 2:13-23



QUICK! WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE QUOTE FROM JOSEPH, EARTHLY FATHER OF JESUS? THINK HARD.

On a recent worldwide survey of famous historical figures from the Bible, Jesus was number one, his mother Mary was number two, and Joseph was number three. Other than Jesus, Joseph is the most famous man in the Bible. Yet most can't come up with one thing he said.

In Matthew 1, Joseph gets word that Mary is pregnant with someone else's child. At first he planned to break off their engagement quietly but an angel informed him that Mary's baby was of God and that Joseph should marry her and raise the child as his own. Without saying a word, Joseph embraces the scandal that may have come with marrying an unwed mother-to-be and faithfully obeys God's command.

In Matthew 2, after the birth of Jesus, an angel warns Joseph that King Herod is searching to kill the Christ child. Immediately, Joseph rises up, grabs his family and evacuates Bethlehem.

After Herod's death, we read of an angel instructing Joseph to take the now toddler Jesus and raise him in the land of Israel. In keeping with his character, the righteous and faithful Joseph obeys, gathers up his wife, son and a few possessions, and makes the long trek back to Nazareth. There he would faithfully raise Jesus for at least another decade.

But there's one thing we don't see coming from Joseph throughout the gospels: words. That's the reason you couldn't come up with a quote from Joseph, the Bible doesn't record even one word from his mouth.

I'm sure Joseph had many instructive words for his wife and son, but that's not what the Bible emphasizes. Instead, we see the highlighting of his obedience. God didn't need a verbose man to raise his Son but he did require an obedient one. Let's not forget God desires obedience more than words. Like Joseph, if we love God, we will obey his commandments.

DECEMBER 28

Matthew 3:1-13



Other than Jesus, who was the greatest man in the Bible? Noah? Abraham? Moses? David?

All these men did mighty things for God but Jesus says there was someone greater. “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:11a).

John the Baptist served as the chief prophet to announce the coming of Jesus. The Book of Luke tells us that Jesus and John the Baptist were relatives and likely knew each other since birth. John was born with the task of preparing the nation of Israel to meet their Messiah, Jesus.

But as great as John the Baptist was, in Matthew 3, we see John telling the people that he was not even worthy to carry Jesus’ sandals. Jesus was more than just a man; he was more than a king. He was more than just the Jewish Messiah; Jesus was the creator of the universe. Jesus was God in the flesh.

As Jesus was creator of all things, John warned the people that the Messiah would have the authority to baptize - to fully immerse - people in the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11). If we accept Jesus as our Savior, he will forgive us of our sins and gather us to be with him in heaven when we die. If we do not receive his forgiveness, he will immerse us in unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12; 13:41-42).

John the Baptist’s message was both grace and judgment. He calls on his listeners to repent (or turn) from their sins and to come to God. What sins do you need to turn from? If you haven’t come to God and asked him for forgiveness, come to him right now. By his grace, he will give you the power to walk away from those sins and walk faithfully in his love.

DECEMBER 29

Matthew 3:13-17



IF YOU ASK PEOPLE WHY SOMEONE NEEDS TO BE BAPTIZED, MOST WILL SAY IT DEMONSTRATES THAT THEIR SINS HAVE BEEN WASHED AWAY.

But if that is the primary reason, then why did Jesus get baptized? Did he need his sins washed away? Of course not! Jesus never sinned (John 8:46; Heb. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21; et al).

Yet in Matthew 3, we see Jesus coming to John the Baptist to be baptized in the River Jordan. Jesus said his baptism was necessary to “fulfill all righteousness.” But if Jesus didn’t need to demonstrate that his sins were washed away, why was this necessary?

The answer lies in the primary purpose of baptism. Jesus will tell his disciples that all authority has been given to him and therefore they should go forth “baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). To be baptized in the name of someone means that you are under their authority.

When Jesus gets baptized by John the Baptist, we see a picture of all three members of the Trinity working together. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove and God the Father verbally proclaims that he is pleased with his Son. By being baptized, Jesus demonstrates that he is coming in the name of, and in submission to, the will of his Father. That’s the primary meaning of baptism. It’s to demonstrate we are under the authority of someone else. We are committed to obey all that Jesus commands us to do.

Thank God that he washed my sins away, and to a certain extent, my baptism represented that as well (Acts 22:16). But baptism demonstrates when someone truly comes to Christ, they are not just asking for forgiveness, they are placing every area of their life under Christ’s authority. What area of your life do you need to submit to Christ today?

DECEMBER 30

Matthew 4:1-11



AFTER FORTY DAYS OF PRAYER AND FASTING IN THE WILDERNESS, THE DEVIL HIT JESUS WITH ALL THAT HE HAD.

First, the devil knew Jesus' flesh was weak and he tempted Jesus with using his divine abilities for physical pleasure. "Turn this stone into bread" (4:3). For the person who created the universe out of nothing (Colossians 1:16), this would have been an easy task. But Jesus doesn't make decisions based on the whims or will of our adversary, even if it would be for his own benefit. Jesus reminded the devil that his sustenance came from with Word of God.

Next, Satan tempted with a provocative statement, "If you are the Son of God ..." Calmly, Jesus replies that he doesn't need God to prove himself in order to know that his Father loves him.

Finally, the devil offers Jesus everything the world has to offer. Satan turned Jesus' gaze to all the kingdoms of the world in hope that Jesus' focus would be on earthly things instead of the God who loved him. Once again, Jesus rebukes the devil with Scripture and demonstrates all that he desired was a pure relationship with his Father.

Each of Jesus' rebukes began with "It is written." Each came from the book of Deuteronomy. What if your spiritual survival depended on your knowledge of the Book of Deuteronomy? If anyone in the history of the planet would have the authority to state his own opinion, it would have been Jesus, yet he chose to quote Scripture. Never doubt the power of speaking God's Word when facing temptation. If you think about it, every sin has its root in what Jesus was tempted with here: the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, and the lust of the eyes (1 John 2:16). But as powerful as these sins are, God's Word is greater.

DECEMBER 31

Matthew 4:12-22



THE GOAL OF EVERY FIRST CENTURY JEW WAS TO HAVE A SON WHO WOULD BECOME A RABBI, THAT IS, A TEACHER OF THE WORD OF GOD.

In order to for your child to become a Rabbi (the modern equivalent would be seminary professor with a Ph.D.), some Rabbi must choose your son to become his disciple at the age of 14. From there the young man would basically go to Bible college, doing everything in his power to mimic the rabbi who disciplined him. A disciple walked where his rabbi walked, studied what his rabbi studied, even ate what his rabbi ate. He goal was to become the perfect clone of his rabbi.

Each Rabbi had his own set of rules that his disciples had to follow known as the rabbi's "yoke." In addition to the rules set forth in Scripture, the rabbi would say, for example, "Here are my set of 100 rules in addition to what Torah teaches you." The more rules, the more you showed yourself to be a true disciple and lover of God.

When Jesus calls his disciples, most of them were older than 14. This demonstrates that no other rabbi chose them. They weren't good enough. They weren't considered, not even by one rabbi, to be smart enough, disciplined enough, committed enough. They weren't "enough."

But Jesus saw something in those young men that all the other rabbis rejected. He said the other rabbis made things too difficult. They were adding all these man-made rules that really didn't matter to God. His yoke was light. Just follow the Word of God.

As we enter into the New Year, rest in the fact that Jesus' yoke is not heavy. He doesn't expect us to be "good enough" to enter the Kingdom of God on our own. Like the strong ox, he carried the weight of the law on his shoulders. By faith in him, we are empowered to follow the teachings of Scripture. No man-made rules added.

JANUARY 1

Matthew 5-7



WHAT'S THE GREATEST SERMON YOU'VE EVER HEARD? I CAN RECALL A FEW. BUT THE BEST ONE WE'LL FIND IS IN MATTHEW 5-7.

In it, Jesus gives his “yoke.” In the sermon on the mount, Jesus teaches his disciples what it takes to be his disciple.

Jesus contrasts the Pharisaical focus on outward behavior with God’s concern about what is going on in our hearts. The Pharisees said, “Don’t commit adultery.” Jesus said, “Don’t lust.” The Pharisees said, “Don’t murder.” Jesus said, “Don’t hate.”

He says we have to forgive others like God forgives us. We cannot worry, our motives must always be pure and whatever standard we use to judge others, God will use that standard to judge us. Here’s the kicker. He says we are to be perfect, just as God is perfect!

We’re doomed! None of us, absolutely none of us can measure up to the bar set in the sermon on the mount. I’m thinking, “But Jesus said that his yoke was light. What he’s asking of us is impossible!”

To which Jesus would reply, “Exactly. Now you’ve got it.”

This is why Jesus said come to him and he’ll give us rest. Followers of Christ realize that only Jesus can meet God’s standards. We can’t live this life on our own power.

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (Romans 3:21–22). By faith in Christ, God’s righteousness is imputed. When God regenerates our hearts so that we might believe, he also attributes the perfect righteousness of Jesus to us so that we become perfect in his sight. Jesus took our sin to the cross “so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Happy New Year! That’s the greatest sermon of all!

JANUARY 2

Matthew 8



SAY THE WORD,” THE CENTURION EXCLAIMED, “AND I KNOW MY SERVANT WILL BE HEALED.”

In Matthew 8 we see a contrast in faith. While the Jews struggled to recognize Jesus for who he is, we find a Roman centurion who recognizes Jesus as someone with supernatural authority over both the physical and spiritual realm. Jesus purported to the Jewish crowd a shocking exposition, “In all of Israel I haven’t found such faith!”

A few days later, Jesus again demonstrates his authority over all things physical and spiritual by removing demons out of two men and placing them into a herd of pigs. Newly possessed by such evil, the swine ran down a cliff and into the sea, drowning themselves.

(We learn from Luke’s Gospel that nearby villagers were aware that at least one of these men had been suffering from demonic possession for years and was doing great harm to himself. They could do nothing to help him. They had even tried chaining him up, perhaps for protecting him from himself or, more likely, protecting themselves from him.)

So when the villagers get word that Jesus had relieved the man of his demonic affliction, what would you expect their reaction to be? Like that of the centurion? Would it be one of thankfulness?

Sadly, the people were more upset about losing a herd of pigs than they were excited a man had been released from demonic oppression. Instead of celebrating with Jesus, they asked him to leave. Those pigs were worth money. The souls of the men meant nothing to them.

How often do we see people value pigs more than other people? The same people who protest, “Save the Whales,” do nothing to stave abortion. How many churches spend more on buildings than on missions? As we walk our way into the upcoming year, let’s be sure our focus is on people instead of pigs.

JANUARY 3

Matthew 9



A FEW YEARS AGO OUR CHURCH HOSTED SOME OF OUR AFRICAN MISSION PARTNERS. THEY WERE ATTENDING ONE OF OUR SEMINARIES AND STAYED WITH US OVER THEIR EASTER BREAK.

These men grew up in impoverished conditions so we wanted to show them some good old Mountaineer hospitality. Each day we fed them some country cooking then took them on an excursion. They rode 4-wheelers, shot skeet (they had never even held a gun), jumped on a trampoline, went hunting, went muddin' in a pickup truck... Things we take for granted, they experienced for the first time.

At the end of the week, one of the Zambian pastors asked me, "Pastor, we have thoroughly enjoyed our time with your church this week. Your typical meal is like a feast for us. But we were wondering, with all this abundance, when do you take the time to fast? We have been here a week, and we haven't fasted once."

Since that time I have visited more than 20 countries and asked native pastors about the practice of fasting. Only in the West do we find Christians who do not fast. We rarely skip a meal for the sake of turning our focus toward God and prayer. Jesus expects us to fast. "When you give..." assumes we will give. "When you pray..." assumes we will pray. Doesn't it follow that when Jesus states, "When you fast..." it assumes fasting on the part of his followers? Jesus explicitly states that after his death, his true disciples will fast, in part, due to their longing for his return.

When is the last time you were more concerned with prayer than you were consumed with a desire for food? "And when the bridegroom is taken away, they *will* fast" (Matthew 9:15). *God, give us a greater desire for you than the things of this world.*

JANUARY 4

Matthew 9:35-38



WHAT IS THE GREATEST NEED FACING THE WORLD TODAY? WHEN WE STOP AND CONSIDER ALL OF THE THINGS THAT ARE HAPPENING AROUND THE WORLD THERE ARE PROBABLY A LOT OF ANSWERS THAT COME TO MIND.

Perhaps you thought about something wonderful like world peace or a cure for cancer. World peace and a cure for cancer would indeed be remarkable improvements to our world that we should pursue. However, the world has a need that is greater than a cure for cancer and world peace.

The world needs to know that Jesus is a Savior who died for their sins so that we can be restored to a right relationship with God. You see, if we bring about world peace or find a cure for cancer, but we do not give people Jesus, then tragically, we have simply made people more comfortable on their way to judgment for their sin. The reality of sin is ultimately why Jesus looks on the crowds and “has compassion on them” (9:36).

But how do people come to have a relationship with Jesus? No matter where people live or what language they speak, people come to know Jesus by someone telling them about Jesus. This is why Jesus says “pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (9:38). One truth this verse tells us is that God plans to accomplish his rescue mission through the prayers of his people. Have you ever prayed that more people would go out into the world to tell people about Jesus? Would you take some time now to pray that God will raise up more people who will go out into the world and tell others about Jesus?

JANUARY 5

Matthew 10



IN CHAPTER 10 OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW JESUS SENDS OUT HIS TWELVE DISCIPLES TO GO AND TELL PEOPLE “THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND” (10:7).

But before he sends the disciples out he tells them something shocking. He says “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves” (10:16). What do you think happens to sheep in the midst of wolves? They get eaten!

But Jesus doesn’t stop there. He goes on to tell the disciples they are going to be beaten, arrested, put on trial, everyone is going to hate them, and they are going to suffer terribly simply for telling people they can be saved by Jesus. But, believe it or not, this is not the most radical thing Jesus tells them. Jesus tells them that all of these evil acts people are going to commit are actually going to cause the gospel to spread. Jesus says, “you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake.” Why? In order “to bear witness before them and the Gentiles” (10:18).

God is teaching us here that there is no amount of evil and rebellion that can be done in the world, or to you, that can overthrow God’s purposes or overcome God’s power. We see the greatest example of this truth in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. The crucifixion of Jesus was the most evil act that humanity has ever committed. Yet, in the resurrection of Jesus, God turned this evil act upside down and turned it into the most remarkable event that has every happened—our salvation. This is why Jesus can say to his disciples, and to us, do not fear! Preach the gospel and entrust yourself to Jesus because he will be with you.

JANUARY 6

Matthew 12



THE UNPARDONABLE SIN. MANY SAY THAT IF SOMEONE DIES WITHOUT FAITH IN CHRIST, THAT PERSON WILL NOT BE ALLOWED INTO HEAVEN.

While it is true that someone must have faith in Christ to be forgiven of their sins, it does not seem that is what Jesus is specifically addressing in Matthew 12:31-32. If rejecting the gospel is what is in question here, then most of us at one time were guilty of that “unforgivable” sin.

There are three elements to this “unpardonable” sin. (1) Jesus is physically present. (2) He performs an undeniable miracle right before their eyes. (3) Instead of recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit, they attribute it to Satan. In his omniscience, Jesus knows that if they reject something that takes zero faith, they will never receive anything that requires faith. There’s no other proof he can give other than performing a personal, verifiable, undeniable miracle right before their eyes. He did that, but they gave glory to their true spiritual father, the devil (John 8:44).

So, is it possible for us to commit that sin today? No. Jesus is not physically present before us. No matter what supernatural event takes place today, it takes some element of faith to know what caused it. The Pharisees had no such excuse!

There be a time in the future when Jesus physically returns to the earth and displays supernatural power in accordance with the Holy Spirit. Just like the Pharisees who blasphemed the work of the Holy Spirit during Jesus’ first advent, at the second coming of Christ those who render the Spirit’s work to the devil will be condemned as well.

Whatever this passage means, nearly all Baptist pastors believe that if you sense the conviction of the Holy Spirit, it is *not* too late. Listen to God’s voice and give him your life today. God is always willing to receive the repentant sinner.

JANUARY 7

Matthew 17:1-13



IN THE FACE OF ALL YOUR TRIALS, JESUS GIVES HOPE THAT IS GREATER THAN ANYTHING THIS WORLD CAN THROW AT YOU.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a mountain to pray and he was changed into a glorious state. This was an incredible validation to Peter's confession just earlier of Jesus as the Messiah as well as an encouraging "sneak peek" of the Christian's future.

So, what is significant about this occasion? It gives hope. Hope that is directly put in the person of Jesus. The week this happened we see Jesus teaching his disciples about his upcoming suffering and the cost of following him. This had to be a very sobering week. Pain and suffering are guaranteed to come. Not only for Jesus, but to those that follow him. The disciples were faced with the question, "will you take up your cross and follow me?" This was a call to die then as much as it is for us today. As much as we can be assured of trials to come, we can be even more assured of our hope to come - Jesus.

Jesus reveals himself to them as the glorious Messiah. What a dose of hope this must have given the disciples as they see Jesus more accurately for who he truly is. Whatever trial you may be going through, look to Jesus the risen King. God is not blind to your situation, rather he is orchestrating it to show you a glimpse of who he is more clearly. How do you need to see Jesus differently today as your hope?

Don't focus on your fear, failures, and circumstances. Focus on Jesus.

"And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only" (17:8).

JANUARY 8

Matthew 17:14-20



IHAD BEEN A BELIEVER FOR MANY YEARS, BUT NOTHING LIKE THIS HAD EVER HAPPENED TO ME, OR MY FAMILY.

When my wife became sick a few years ago, my faith was shaken. These situations will do one of two things – drive you to your knees, or push you away from God. My family chose to believe and pray. Over a six-year period, we saw answered prayers, and experienced God’s miracles. We believed that God was on the throne, and my wife was under the protection of God’s hand.

In this biblical story, the disciples were unable to heal a man who was demon possessed and continually fell into the water. The man’s father comes to Jesus and says, “Lord, have mercy on my son... I brought him to your disciples but they could not heal him.” It was almost like the miracle police were telling on them! After Jesus healed the boy, the disciples came to Jesus and asked why they were unable to drive out the demon. Jesus simply replies to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you” (17:20).

This verse has frequently burned in my heart as I have reflected upon six years of miracles. Though we saw many things happen that no one can explain, God eventually gave my wife respite, and a new body in heaven. Why did my families’ prayers not work? Why did she have to go through those trials, only to end in her imminent death? My family still does not know the answer to that question, but I will tell you we still believe in healing, even if it is in heaven. Don’t let the world shake your faith. You of little faith: keep on believing, keep trusting, and keep praying.

JANUARY 9

Matthew 18



MATTHEW 18 IS A GREAT PICTURE OF WHAT THE DAILY LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN AND THE COMMUNITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE SHOULD LOOK.

Sin and pride (18:1-9). Temptations are opportunities to grow in faith and obedience to Jesus. It's not a sin to be tempted, but it is a sin to act on that temptation. We must be on guard against sin and be real with the fact that we do sin at times (so don't hide it). Pride is a horrible sin that we all fall to in various ways. Pride takes your eyes off God's greatness and focuses on self. ("Who is the greatest?") Our natural tendency is to think that we're "OK" and don't need help. We all need humility in our lives. Humility is a gift from God (no matter how it comes).

Repent (18:10-14). Jesus (the Good Shepherd) goes after his sheep that go astray. We have a loving God who pursues you and I even when we sin. When confronted about sin by the Holy Spirit directly or through fellow believers, don't be mad that you 'got caught', rather rejoice that you are being loved. The only way sin is dealt with properly is when it is brought into the light. A call to repent is a loving gift.

Forgiveness (18:15-35). Just as God in Christ forgives you, you are to forgive others. When the condition to forgive is "as Christ forgives you," then there's hope to be free from anger, bitterness, resentment, and control.

Does this cycle characterize your life? Your church? Who do you have in your life to offer these gifts and calls to you? Have (or find) someone to be this to you as you should be to them.

JANUARY 10

Matthew 19



WHEN WE LOOK AT THE TRACK RECORD OF GOD THROUGHOUT HISTORY WE CAN CLEARLY SEE AND TRUST THAT HE WAS, IS, AND WILL ALWAYS BE COMPLETELY FAITHFUL.

When we look at the track record of humanity you can clearly see that you and I are not completely faithful and obedient. The greater we see this gap of faithfulness the greater our awe of what Jesus did for us should grow.

Jesus uses marriage to reveal our hard hearts. Just like in the times of Moses and Jesus, divorce runs rampant today because we are unfaithful. What hope does an unfaithful friend or spouse have? Jesus. Jesus is the faithful friend and husband that we are not. His Spirit is in you and empowers you to become more faithful. If marriage requires faithfulness, then the people said, “it is better not to marry.” The problem isn’t marriage, it’s unfaithful hearts.

Jesus also turns to a rich young ruler who is considered a morally ‘good person.’ He claimed to obey all the rules, yet when Jesus asked him to sell his stuff and follow him, he left sorrowful. We may think we can do enough ‘good works’ to earn God’s favor, but we cannot. Your external actions are driven from your internal heart. Seeing this, the disciples then asked, “Who then can be saved?”

No one is perfectly faithful, obedient, and good. This rightly separates us from God. Jesus is faithful, obedient, and good. He brings us, undeservedly, back to God. It’s only by his work in you that you can change from naturally unfaithful to supernaturally faithful. Salvation by your own work is impossible; salvation by Jesus’ work is assured.

“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (19:26).

JANUARY 11

Matthew 20



WHO DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE A GREAT PERSON? A COMPANY CEO? A SPORTS STAR? A MUSICIAN? WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES THEM GREAT?

Greatness, by definition, is to be above average, to do something with excellence or very well. To strive to be great is a wonderful thing. You should strive to be a great employee, manager, teacher, mom, neighbor, friend, or student.

As Jesus continues to engage with people, we can see that he spends most of his time with what would be considered the average and below average people in the community. This gives us a contrast of what the world would consider great people and those that are not. Jesus, throughout the Book of Matthew, has been showing us what his kingdom will be like.

Jesus redefines greatness from one based on power, position, prestige, and prosperity, to one based on humility and service. Which dictionary do you pursue greatness from? May we, his people, be marked by humility and service in our cities. Think and pray about ways you can begin to humbly serve your city this week.

Worldly greatness is measured by how many people are under you. Kingdom greatness is measured by how many people you lift up. The world values power, Jesus values humility. Worldly greatness is about how known your name is. Kingdom greatness is about how much we make Jesus' name known.

As we pursue kingdom greatness, let's use Romans 12:10 as an awesome challenge, "Outdo one another in showing honor." Look at the people that God has put around you as opportunities to show honor by serving and encouraging.

"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (20:26).

JANUARY 12

Matthew 21



WE ARE NOW IN THE PASSION WEEK - THE LAST SEVEN DAYS BEFORE THE RESURRECTION - OF JESUS' LIFE.

It begins with Jesus entering into Jerusalem in a humble way. Is this how a king should enter into a city? A king should enter with a grand entrance, right? The president has Air Force One. Celebrities have red carpets. Bands have stages and spot lights. What about Jesus? No private jet. No red carpet. No spot lights. He comes to his city as the humble King on a donkey.

As we were once not citizens of his kingdom, there are many in West Virginia who are not yet a part of Jesus' kingdom either. Praise God that he has given us this day to spread the good news of Jesus to those that haven't humbly submitted to King Jesus.

Humility is required to enter into the kingdom of God. It takes recognizing God's holiness and our sinfulness, then looking to the cross as the means to be reconciled to God. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). It takes humility to recognize your sin and turn from it and to Jesus. Humility, not position or authority, is the entrance to Jesus' kingdom.

Just as this unworthy donkey was used by Jesus to carry him to Jerusalem, we too (as Jesus' servants) get to carry the gospel (the good news of Jesus) throughout our cities and great state with the certain hope that some will turn to King Jesus. What a privilege.

Seeing Jesus as King produces humility. It recognizes his greatness, power, and authority, not yours. Where do you need to grow in humility?

"They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them" (21:7).

JANUARY 13

Matthew 22



JESUS IS NOW IN THE MIDST OF A HEATED DAY OF CONFRONTATION FROM THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

This is, perhaps, the most clearly exposed contrast between Jesus' kingdom that he is building and the kingdom of earthly institutions.

We see a picture of a king sending out invitations to a wedding feast. This raises the question of who decides who can join the party. The king does. Matthew then moves to the authority of the Roman Caesar and paying taxes. This raises the question of who owns anything. Jesus owns everything. Jesus then is confronted about a relational dispute, but Jesus shows them their error according to Scripture. God's Word is true. Lastly, Jesus is asked, "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus rightly tells them to, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart..." (22:37). Jesus was being barraged from various people groups about authority and he left them all speechless.

Jesus then goes on the offensive and asks, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (22:42). The book of Matthew is aimed at showing Jesus as the promised Messiah coming from the genealogy of King David. Here Jesus is connecting himself directly to David and leaving the Pharisees "unable to answer him a word" (22:46) because Jesus truly is the promised Messiah that the Old Testament was waiting for.

What do the people of your city think of Jesus? What are the various authorities and prevailing cultures that are not in submission to Jesus? How can you effectively take the gospel into those arenas?

Don't get too caught up in the earthly organizations/authorities. Jesus is Lord over them all. What areas might you need to repent of from putting your hope, identity, value, worth, and trust in?

JANUARY 14

Matthew 23



IN MATTHEW 23 WE SEE A GLIMPSE OF JESUS THAT SHOWS HIS LOVE FOR PEOPLE AND HATRED OF SIN. TWO POWERFUL EMOTIONS THAT REFLECT GOD'S HEART.

What was the last thing that you mourned over? What do you cry about? What does it take for you to be emotionally moved? What causes you sleepless nights? Stop and answer those questions for yourself before continuing.

Because of God's holiness and love for people he has a hatred for sin. Jesus unleashes a heavy indictment (Seven Woes) against those who were not loving God nor people as they were supposed to. The religious leaders had a system set up that made their lives comfortable, showed them as the authority, and didn't require them to do much. Allow this to be a warning to you if your life reflects the same characteristics (comfort, control, pride). This is certainly a passage of Scripture that combats Jesus as simply a soft, gentle, loving, peaceful, non-confrontational person. Jesus lovingly and compassionately confronts those in sin.

The heart of God is also displayed as Jesus looks over the city of Jerusalem and laments. Jesus weeps over those that reject him. It might be good to go to one of the hilltops around your city and simply gaze upon it and think of all the people that God has put you around – and weep. When is the last time you wept for people? Over sin and its impact on people's lives in your city? Over people rejecting Jesus? This might need to become a prayer of yours, "God soften my heart to have a love for people as you do."

"O Jerusalem... How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (23:37).

JANUARY 15

Matthew 24



YOU WANT TO MAKE EVERY DAY COUNT FOR SOMETHING. YOUR PRIORITIES ARE REEVALUATED AND YOUR RESOURCES ARE SPENT TOWARDS THOSE ENDS.

Each year you get older and the closer you get to death, the more you consider each day of life as a gift and realize more that tomorrow isn't guaranteed.

As we're moving through Matthew, in a couple days, Jesus will be crucified. He starts to talk about the future. He tells us before his death that our time is not a stopwatch counting up, rather it is a timer that is counting down. Time is running out.

Jesus begins to clearly teach about signs of the end times. With various signs to look forward to, down to an unknown specific day and hour, we are on borrowed time.

The purpose of Jesus coming was to take the wrath of God for sinners upon himself, thus making it possible for the forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. This is great news for every human being that has ever lived or will ever live. This is only great news, though, if people hear it.

With the time of Jesus' return (and your death) a mystery, it should fuel our passion for evangelism and making every opportunity count to share the gospel. In West Virginia, more people are dying than are being born. About 60 people will die today in our state. How many of them are in your city? Not knowing who'll die, when they'll die, nor when Jesus will return, let that drive your prayers for the lost and personal evangelism to those that are in your life and city.

Who will you share the good news with today?

"But concerning that day and hour no one knows..." (24:36).

JANUARY 16

Matthew 25



JESUS CONCLUDES HIS FIFTH AND FINAL DISCOURSE HERE. THIS IS ABOUT BEING READY FOR JUDGMENT.

This will come at Jesus' return or at your death. Either way, you are always to be living in a constant state of readiness. As you await the return of Jesus, you are to be actively on mission to spread the gospel to the nations and steward your life in a way that loves God and the people that he has entrusted to you well. Readiness can be gauged by your devotion, stewardship, and mission.

Devotion is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. This is to worship God for who he is and what he's done for you. This is to quickly repent of sin as it appears in your life and to continually put your faith and trust in the finished work of Jesus. Devotion is to seek God's face. Are your affections for Christ constantly being stirred?

Stewardship is hit on here by the parable of the talents. The idea is that you are to take what God has given you and make it grow through wise and faithful stewardship. God expects you to be faithful with what he's entrusted to you: people, jobs, money, possessions, positions... How is your faithfulness to God, your spouse, your kids, your job, your friends?

Mission is telling others of Jesus before he returns or they die. As you read this chapter you need the descriptions of hell to hit you hard. It's a real place that real people will go to. You have the opportunity to be the means of grace that God uses to bring people into his eternal rest.

"Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your master" (25:21).

JANUARY 17

Matthew 26:1-46



IF YOU KNEW TONIGHT WAS GOING TO BE YOUR LAST NIGHT BEFORE YOU DIED, WHAT YOU SPEND IT DOING?

Jesus spent it sharing a meal with his disciples and in prayer to his Heavenly Father.

Jesus knew he was about to be crucified and has been telling the disciples that this was going to take place. Knowing that he would soon be deserted by his disciples, betrayed by one, and denied by another, Jesus still chose to draw close to them. The heart of God is to save sinners.

“When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve” (26:20).

The Last Supper was full of deep meaning. It was the transition of Passover from an annual sacrifice to a remembrance of Jesus as the Passover Lamb who would sacrifice himself once for all. He was giving his disciples a preview of what was about to happen to his body on the cross. His body will be broken like the bread and blood spilled like the wine. It was also an encouragement that Jesus would again share a meal with them in the future.

We also see Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane. What a picture of human failure and Jesus’ faithfulness. His closest friends and disciples couldn’t keep watch, couldn’t pray, couldn’t even stay awake in Jesus’ greatest time of need. Yet through it, Jesus faithfully kept watch, prayed to his Heavenly Father, and entrusted himself to his Father. Jesus was strengthened by God the Father in his weakness and abandonment from his friends. Jesus can strengthen you in your times of weakness and abandonment.

“Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here, while I go over there and pray’” (26:36).

JANUARY 18

Matthew 26-27



THE GREATEST HUMAN DILEMMA IS THAT GOD IS HOLY, AND WE ARE NOT.

God is righteous, and we are not. Everyone will admittedly state, “no one is perfect.” While this is true, we don’t often see how this plays itself out. We minimize sin to try to make us feel better about ourselves than we truly are. God knows and cannot be fooled. We are not good.

Man’s heart is on full display here. The stage is set for the very act that would split time as we know it in half – the crucifixion of Jesus. In this act, we see many characters in this epic story.

Let’s consider the characters Matthew shows us:

- 26:3-4 Religious leaders plotting to kill Jesus
- 26:14 Judas is seeking an opportunity to betray Jesus.
- 26:56 Jesus’ own disciples deserted him.
- 26:59 The Sanhedrin false testimony to put Jesus to death
- 26:74 Peter denying him Jesus
- 27:23 The crowds shouting for Jesus’ crucifixion.
- 27:26 Pilate delivered Jesus to be crucified.
- 27:30 Roman soldiers mocked, spit, struck, and stripped Jesus.
- 27:44 Robbers were crucified with Jesus and reviled him.

We cannot disconnect ourselves from this story as if we would never do this. Our hearts do the same thing today. Have you ever hidden your faith in fear? Walked away from the Church? Fallen to peer pressure? Blamed God and been angry at him? Been an unfaithful friend?

Thank God for his saving grace despite our wandering hearts.

“Peter answered him, ‘Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away’” (26:33).

JANUARY 19

Matthew 26:36-46



JESUS, KNOWING HE WAS ABOUT TO FACE THE GREATEST SUFFERING IN ALL OF HISTORY, WAS PRAYING IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE.

“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (26:39).

The reality of what Jesus came to do, to bear the sins of the world, was about to be fulfilled. Jesus refers to this as “drinking the cup” that God the Father had for him. Why would Jesus need to drink the cup of God’s wrath? Why would Jesus need to take the punishment for sin? He hadn’t sinned, nor deserved God’s wrath. This doesn’t seem fair!

This is not fair, it is grace. Jesus being falsely accused, betrayed, beaten, mocked, and ultimately crucified on a cross, was not a mistake – it was the plan. Jesus said in John 12:27, “For this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” What happened to Jesus on the cross is exactly what was prophesied would happen to the Messiah in Isaiah 52-53.

Suffering and God’s wrath are also what you and I rightly deserve. We have and do choose sin at times, we turn from God, and can become depressed when thinking about the current state of West Virginia and the world. Suffering, as a believer, though, must be seen within God’s sovereignty.

See your suffering as a redeeming tool in God’s hand that shows you a glimpse of what Jesus went through to rescue you, the severity of what sin does in this world, the grace of God who is with you in the midst of it, and a reminder that one day suffering will end because of the suffering that Jesus went through for you.

JANUARY 20

Matthew 26:21,34



MATTHEW 26 GIVES US TWO EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE DEALING WITH SIN AND GUILT.

Both Judas and Peter, just like you and I (Romans 3:23), sin. They betrayed Jesus. The work of God in our lives is to reveal our sin (to show us our need for a rescuer) as well as reveal Jesus to us as the only means of being rescued. Christians should see growth in our repentance of sin and faith in Jesus. As long as there is breath in our lungs on this side of life, you and I will continually have opportunities to choose to either sin or bring God glory in our lives. We sin when we do anything that goes against God's nature and Word. Guilt and shame follow sin.

So, what are we to do when we do inevitably sin? How do we deal with guilt and shame?

Judas and Peter give us great examples of the two ways we can deal with sin. Judas betrayed Jesus for money. Simon denied Jesus out of fear.

First is the way of Judas. We can see our sin against God and rightly feel guilty. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:26). Death is the consequence of sin from the Garden of Eden. The death of Judas, to pay for his own sin, is one way to make atonement. This death is eternal.

Secondly is the way of Peter. After realizing his sin, he doesn't lose faith. His sorrow leads him to repentance and restoration with Jesus. John 21 gives us a beautiful picture of Peter's restoration. The death of Jesus, to pay for Peter's (your) sin, is another way to make atonement.

The cost of sin was paid for on the cross of Jesus. Take it there.

JANUARY 21

Matthew 28



THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IS WHAT SEPARATES CHRISTIANITY FROM EVERY OTHER RELIGION.

The Messiah was prophesied hundreds of years earlier that he would be rejected, tortured, and killed. This had just taken place, much to everyone's surprise. This was the darkest moment in all of history, when humanity crucified the Messiah. On a spiritual level, it would appear that Satan and sin have victory over God. Oh, how God has flipped the script though.

"Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said" (28:5-6).

This very dark, sinful human act, is what God would use to bring the light of his saving grace to the very people that rejected him. That was you at one point. That is someone else right now. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the greatest light of hope that could ever come to those living in darkness.

The resurrection of Jesus is what makes salvation possible for you, me, and everyone in West Virginia. In the midst of a dark and depressed state, it's only the light of the gospel that can bring about hope and change. The bodily resurrection of Jesus is what gives real hope to real people who need to really be rescued from sin and its effects. Jesus rose so that we too will rise with him.

Without the resurrection of Jesus, we are to be pitied above all, but with it we are to be the most hopeful and joyous of all. This same hope and joy is needed most for your neighbors, baristas, roommates, co-workers, and professors.

JANUARY 22

Mark 1



ONE OF THE MANY ATTRIBUTES MY FATHER HANDED DOWN TO ME WAS AN INCREDIBLE RESPECT FOR AUTHORITY.

Coming out of a military family, I learned respect for my parents, elders, teachers, pastors, and supervisors. I believe this is a quality lacking in many generations.

Yes, it is important that one understands authority, but even more important to know where that authority comes. Mark 1 is full of great examples from John the Baptist “proclaiming a baptism of repentance” (1:4). Though John understood his purpose, he also realized the foundation in which his ministry was rooted. “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie” (1:7). John was successful in what he pursued, but the authority John was given was even more clear in John 1:8, “He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.”

What about Jesus? Yes, even he was subordinate to the authority given him. The Father speaks to him with deep pleasure in his obedience of baptism, he walks loyally into the desert when the Holy Spirit drove him into the wilderness. The worshipers in the synagogue also recognized his power as they stated, “What is this? A new teaching with authority?” (1:27)

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, *and there he prayed*” (1:35). Why would the Son of God need to pray? Because he understood authority and from where his authority came. If one can ever grasp that principle, Jesus’ power, purpose and plan for their lives will be evident.

JANUARY 23

Mark 2



WHEN I FIRST BECAME A BELIEVER, I WANTED TO TELL OTHERS ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO ME. THOUGH I WAS NOT TRAINED, I SHARED MY STORY.

In Mark 2, I love how many brought their friends to hear Jesus. I am envious of the four men who determined to bring their crippled friend to Jesus. They tried to get him through the door. Because “there was no more room,” they decided together to take him up on the roof. This method would have been possible because of the thatched roofs that were so prominent during the time of Christ. They would not take no for an answer.

“Seeing their faith” (all five of them), Jesus healed the man of his disease, but also forgave him of his sin through faith alone. The paralytic was not saved because of being healed, but rather saved because of his faith that Jesus would heal him. His confession of Jesus was the turning point of his life! When was the last time that you went out of your way to bring someone to Jesus, not taking no for an answer?

Consider this illustration:

“A medical doctor attended a conference in a hotel near the ocean. During break, he looked out and saw a young boy throwing something in the ocean. At noon, he again saw the boy throwing objects into the ocean. The doctor walked out on the beach and saw the boy picking up starfish and throwing them back in the ocean one by one. The doctor asked, ‘Why are you throwing the starfish in the ocean, there are hundreds on the shore. What good do you think throwing a few will make?’ The young boy picked up another starfish and threw it in the ocean and said, ‘It will make a difference to this one’” (unknown).

JANUARY 24

Mark 3



IN OUR CULTURE, COLLEGE COLORS ARE IMPORTANT, BUT NOT AS CRITICAL AS KNOWING ON WHICH SIDE OF THE CREATOR YOU STAND.

College sports are an amazing phenomenon. In my lifetime I have not encountered anything more divisive than college colors. I grew up around the Alabama-Auburn rivalry, which can split the strongest of families, and prove thicker than blood! There was also no fence riding allowed. It is a scary concept.

Mark 3 begins the confrontation of the gospel during Jesus' ministry. First, the Pharisees went out and started plotting how to destroy Jesus. The demons acknowledged the incarnation of the Messiah when confronted, "You are the Son of God" (3:11).

Once Jesus chose his disciples, the polarity of the gospel began to escalate. He went to see his family, and they said, "He's out of his mind" (3:21). He also declared that the only sin that does not allow repentance is the blaspheme of the Holy Spirit (3:29). Though difficult to swallow, the gospel is inclusive in its love for people, but exclusive in its demand for confession. That exclusivity is why Christians in other countries are worshiping underground, teaching in secret, losing their families, and being stripped off their livelihood.

Believers in America have had it easy for quite a long time. Take some time today to thank God for the salvation granted to you, and that he was longsuffering with you. When the gospel causes division in your family or friendships, be committed to the truth and to the power it has to save anyone! "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

JANUARY 25

Mark 4



ONE OF THE MOST USELESS CLASSES I TOOK IN COLLEGE WAS BRITISH LITERATURE.

I cannot remember much about it for two reasons. First, the teacher resembled someone from an insane asylum. Second, I just needed a class to fulfill a humanities elective. Bad combination. This class became like a foreign language to me, and whenever I was called on to participate in class, it was like one who was asked to explain the theory of relativity through prose.

This chapter begins the use of parables in Mark's Gospel. This method of teaching was a common practice of Jesus as he dealt with the crowds and privately with his disciples. The use of parables had a two-fold purpose. It was easier for the common person to understand the gospel with a common story, and made it harder for those whose heart was already hardened by their religiosity.

Being a simple guy, I am glad he spoke in parables, because it makes the Scripture very personal to me through its simplicity. Oddly enough, the ones who were the worldlier and spiritually educated had a difficult time grasping the common language of the people. This mindset is a result of centuries of legalism; it became a series of imprisoned thoughts on a page.

When asked why he used parables while teaching, Jesus assured the twelve that "to you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God" (4:11). For those with hardened hearts saw the parables as stumbling blocks of rhetoric, "they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven" (4:12).

In his sovereignty, Jesus already knew the religious would reject the gospel. Be thankful the Word of God is understandable as he reveals it to you.

JANUARY 26

Mark 5



WHEN SOMEONE IS EXCITED ABOUT A SPECIAL DAY OR A MILESTONE IN THEIR LIFE, THERE IS NO HESITATION OF TELLING SOMEONE ELSE ABOUT IT.

When I believed I was going to marry my wife, I told my parents, siblings, friends, co-workers, and then even my acquaintances. I was not ashamed of this news. I knew in my heart that she was the one!

Many in Scripture had an experience with Christ and were not ashamed to tell others about him. One such occasion was the demoniac who was found in the region of Gerasenes. This man, overtaken by multiple demons, approached Jesus as he came onto the shore. Jesus had not even said anything to this crazy man, but he knelt before Jesus with no prompting or coercion. He then commenced to say, “What do you have to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God” (5:7). This action of the demoniac’s approach said a lot about Jesus’ character.

A couple of things to remember. First, the demons, no matter their quantity, had no power over Jesus no matter the scenario. Second, the demons begged Jesus to send them into the pigs (5:12). This showed the deity of Christ, and the authority he possessed over all created beings, even spiritual ones. It is good to know that the God we willingly serve has power over things seen and unseen.

Legion went into the pigs, ran off the cliff, and drowned. The man was immediately returned to his right mind and dressed in appropriate attire. The man’s response to his regeneration needs to be emphasized. He went to Decapolis (ten town region) to tell others “how much Jesus had done for him” (5:20). Knowing what Jesus has done for you, when was the last time that you were not afraid to share that news with your parents, siblings, friends, co-workers, and eventually people outside of your circles of influence?

JANUARY 27

Mark 6



IN THE 1953 MOVIE, “THE ROBE,” A ROMAN SOLDIER NAMED MARCELLUS HAS TAKEN PART IN THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST.

Marcellus has nightmares about Jesus, the robe, the crucifixion, and is under the impression that the robe of Christ has cursed him. He takes a trip back to Jerusalem to find the robe so he can be freed of the apparent curse. In the end, Marcellus becomes a believer, and realizes the saving power was in the God-man Jesus and not the robe.

There is an interesting verse in this chapter that can be overlooked. When Jesus went into villages, the people longed to touch his robe to be healed, just like the woman with the issues from bleeding (5:28). Scripture says that “they implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well” (6:56). For one to believe that Jesus’ robe could heal was an amazing act of faith. These people had been imprisoned by legalism for centuries, but were now desperate for the coming of the true King. This King would be able to overcome the Jewish law as well as Roman tyranny. According to the Law, disease was associated with sin present in your life. This teaching caused many to question the belief system they had followed for so long. Also, the act it took for Jesus to heal was an incredible miracle that could only come from God!

Yet, there are many days that we just wish that Christ would do something miraculous. That desperation is what we need in our lives as we long for Christ to show himself as a healer, teacher, and savior. Do not be so skeptical to think that miracles don’t occur. Instead, be like Marcellus, who believed in the power of Christ, and walked to his own death because of it.

JANUARY 28

Mark 7



A YOUNG MAN HAD BEEN TO WEDNESDAY NIGHT BIBLE STUDY. THE PASTOR HAD SPOKEN ABOUT LISTENING TO GOD AND OBEYING THE LORD'S VOICE.

The young man couldn't help but wonder, "Does God still speak to people?" Later that night, sitting in his car, he just began to pray, "God, if you still speak to people, speak to me. I will listen. I will do my best to obey."

A Gentile woman comes to Jesus full of faith. She kneels at Jesus' feet and begs him to cast a demon out of her daughter who is not present. When I think of this type of faith, I cannot help but be somewhat ashamed of the lack of faith I possess. Jesus' response is an interesting one, "...It is not right to take the children's [Jews] bread and throw it to the dogs" (7:27). Not only did Jesus seemingly insult her, but called her a dog, which was customary towards Gentiles.

Instead of going away dejected, I love her faith answer that gives hope to all who believe: "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (7:28). What? Jesus was testing her faith to see how deeply it really voyaged. I quake at her answer as she longed to see her daughter whole. Jesus' response is a beautiful picture of mercy, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter" (7:29). Her faith had saved the spiritual and physical life of her daughter!

So, the young man in the story above was prompted to buy a gallon of milk and take it to an apartment next door. As crazy as that may sound, the family who lived there had run out of money, and had no milk for their crying, hungry infant. Why should we listen and obey God's voice? In the words of Paul Harvey, "Now you

JANUARY 29

Mark 8



THERE ARE MANY POPULAR QUOTES FROM WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE PLAYS.

One of his most popular quotes from the tragedy “Romeo and Juliet” goes like this, “What’s in a name? that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” In other words, call a rose by something else, and no one would really care. Why? Because one would still appreciate its beauty, creativity, and incredible scent. In this case, the name doesn’t really matter, only the essence of the rose.

Mark records for the Church one of the most important passages in Christendom. The Twelve are with Jesus at Caesarea Philippi which was city full of statues and art forms dedicated to multiple gods from the Greco-Roman culture. Amid this culture, Jesus breached the subject of his increasing popularity over the last few months. He was not feeding his ego, rather, he was testing the disciples understanding of who he revealed himself to be. Verse 27 says, “Who do people say that I am?” Interesting question. Interesting response.

Jesus then shifts the focus in verse 29, “But who do you say that I am?” What Jesus meant was, “Who do you, my closest comrades, believe that I am?” I love Peter’s response and how quickly he shares it, “You are the Messiah.” Peter got it right! The title Messiah, or Christ, is one that cannot not be replaced. It is one that claims deity, power, and relationship. When coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus, one must understand that he is the only way to life (John 14:6). Jesus was called many names during his ministry. Most of them were negative, or sarcastic, but none of those names meet the criteria of the God-Man. There is no substitute.

JANUARY 30

Mark 9



THOUGH I DON'T UNDERSTAND, GOD IS SOVEREIGN, AND HE MADE ME.

I enjoy being on the mountaintop – smell the goodness of God, feel the wind of Christ's freedom, and experience the joy of worship. I tend to lean towards staying there – on the mountaintop! Last time I checked, I am not independently wealthy, so the mountaintop is a temporary place. One must come down to reality, smell the true roses of life, and experience the thorns that come alongside them. If one is in the arms of Christ, it is not a bad place to be.

Jesus allowed Peter, James, and John to experience the ultimate mountaintop! He invited them to come up a high mountain and watch him transfigure (Greek: metamorpoo) which means "his divine glory shone out through his human form, and not in the case of Moses, caused by God having appeared to him" (Unger, pg. 1112). Wow, what a scene to behold! Jesus was in his glorified state, from that of an "ordinary human being to a divine being in all his glory" ("New American Commentary"). Though hard for us to understand, that was Jesus' original state, so he was comfortable with that.

But for Peter, James, and John it was completely foreign. How often does one experience a portrait of God in his glory? So, what did they do? Peter spewed from his pie hole, "Rabbi, it's good that we are here. Let us make three tents" (9:5) He didn't know what to say because they were terrified" (9:6). Attempting to be helpful, Peter was alluding to the fact that he didn't want to leave. Who would blame him? For believers, no matter how good the mountaintop might be, eventually one must come down in the valley where the you belong. Enjoy the mountaintop when it is available, but don't get too comfortable.

JANUARY 31

Mark 10



WHEN MY DAUGHTER WAS SIX, HER INQUISITIVE MIND AMAZED ME. SHE WOULD ASK SO MANY QUESTIONS AND MANY WERE ABOUT GOD.

She had a deep intellect and one day her questions led to an incredible insight about Jesus. She asked, “Daddy, what does God look like?” I was obviously the “more mature” one of the two, so I replied, “Honey, we don’t know what God looks like.” She sat there a moment, and I could tell her mind was churning 100mph. She looked at me and said, “Well, if Jesus is God (we had taught her that truth), then doesn’t God look like Jesus?” I immediately realized that sometimes wisdom comes from the mouth of children.

Jesus loved children. He is described in Scripture as seeing them as important to society. In Judea, the crowds had smothered him with their needs and hunger for truth. In verse 13, “And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them.” Such an honor for children to be held by the God of the universe. His intentions were to just hold them and bless them. He loved his creations.

The disciples thought it to be a waste of time and tried to run them away. Jesus said, “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it” (10:15). Jesus was not only teaching the world to love and take care of children but to realize they teach us how to come to God for salvation. John MacArthur says, “Children are readily accepted into the kingdom... We are wise to become like children in our spiritual dependency upon the Lord.” I miss those days with my children when they were soaking in the truths of God, but I also cherish those times as I learned so much from them. This passage shows us what God looks like.

FEBRUARY 1

Mark 11-12



CHAPTER 11 MARKS THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF CHRIST'S EARTHLY MINISTRY. HE KNEW EXACTLY WHAT HE WAS DOING AND WHY.

By this time his heart had turned toward the cross and to his imminent death, burial, and resurrection. Much transpires over the next few days in Jerusalem. Jesus is brought in on a prophetic donkey, cleanses the temple, authority is challenged, almost arrested, tempted by the Pharisees on giving, challenged on the resurrection, debated on the greatest commandment, and warns the people about the legalism of the scribes.

At the end of Chapter 12, an obscure passage arises amid Jesus' challenges. One day in the temple, Jesus noticed a widow who dropped two small coins into the treasury box. It is amazing how Christ could take the insignificant and turn it into a beautiful truth. As he admires the sacrifice of the widow, I can imagine the thoughts of love that Jesus had towards this person who probably had nothing to give. She most likely lived alone, ate sparingly, forfeited entertainment, and stretched everything that she had to just survive.

Americans, on the other hand, have mostly first world problems, and don't really know what it means to sacrifice in our cozy little world. I believe Jesus wants and does meet our needs, but I don't think he cares what color our brand-new truck will be (which, by the way, I would like to have). On the other hand, he does care about the condition of our hearts when it comes to money. Kyle Idleman says, "The god of money wants us to believe that our significance comes from what we make of ourselves. But we find our true identity in Christ." Don't be afraid to be a generous believer, no matter how little or much money you encounter in your lifetime.

FEBRUARY 2

Mark 13



WE TEND TO MAKE JESUS VERY SMALL. MAYBE BECAUSE HE CAME TO EARTH AS A MAN, OR HE WAS SEMI-LIMITED IN HIS ATTRIBUTES, OR MAYBE BECAUSE ONE STRUGGLES WITH THE INCARNATE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

Regardless, it is important as a believer to come to the reality that Jesus is a great God, with a great church, and an imminent Second Coming. It doesn't matter whether one understands this theology in its entirety, but only to have a good handle on those Scriptures. Eschatology is one area of the Bible in which we can agree to disagree.

Jesus had been walking down the streets of Jerusalem, and a disciple brings up the truth of the massiveness of the temple. Jesus commences to prophesy that one day "there will not left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (13:2). From this comment, a series of oracles develops into an entire chapter of predictions of the last days. As the disciples try to listen and grasp what Jesus is trying to convey, hopefully they heard at least one prophecy in those few minutes – verse 26, "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory." That news should have made the hair stand up on their necks! Why? First, Jesus had not left them yet, and secondly, why would he be up in the clouds for any reason? It takes a great faith to trust that Jesus really is coming back in that fashion.

John Walvoord says it well, "The Second Coming is an event that terminates on earth and will take hours to unfold. During this time the earth will revolve, making it possible for his coming to be witnessed by the entire world. In many respects, the Second Coming is the climax of history and the ultimate triumph of Jesus Christ." He comes back as a king!

FEBRUARY 3

Mark 14



EVERYTHING WAS IN PLACE FOR THE REVOLUTION AGAINST THE BRITISH EMPIRE.

The Continental Congress had asked Thomas Jefferson to draft a Declaration of Independence from whom they saw as a tyrant in King George III. After several revisions to assure the wording was correct, members of Congress ratified the document and began signing it on July 4, 1776. The most popular signature most Americans are familiar with is John Hancock. Though he is not the most well-known of the 56 signers, his signature is two to three times larger than all the others. He wanted to make sure it was clear that he was a dissenter and historical accounts say, “There! I guess King George will be able to read that!” Basically, if the patriots lost the war, he knew his life was over.

This chapter of Mark was a little bit like that story. Jesus had placed his stamp on the religious legalists and without question had signed his own death warrant. Now he was spiritually, physically, and mentally ready for the cross. The chief priest and scribes were plotting an arrest to rid themselves of this annoying self-proclaimed prophet.

In the middle of this scenario of events, a special one occurs. “A woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head” (14:3). No one could have predicted this incredible act of worship. Right in the middle of what was probably the most difficult week of his life, a common person anointed him in advance for burial (14:8). Knowing he had put his “John Hancock” on the declaration against sin, hell, death, and the grave, Jesus was now ready to complete his final act of love for mankind. What can you give to Jesus for that act of sacrifice?

FEBRUARY 4

Mark 15



IKNOW THAT GOD IS SOVEREIGN, HOLY, AND KNOWS WHAT HE IS DOING. BUT THE TORTURE OF CHRIST IS SOMETIMES MORE THAN I CAN HANDLE.

After Jesus is anointed with perfume in Chapter 14, he spends time with his closest friends sharing the Passover meal with them, reveals his betrayer, predicts Peter's denial, prays in the garden, is arrested by Caiaphas, faces the Sanhedrin, Herod, and Pilate. These events all happen in one night – a kangaroo court. I think about the stress of those events, and sometimes I wonder why it had to be like that.

On the other hand, I am thankful for the truth of the Scripture, and that it does not sugarcoat the death of Christ. Hebrews 9:22 says, "According to the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." Someone had to pay the price of sin, and it surely could not be us. The spotless lamb of God came for that purpose. Christ had prepared himself for 33 years for this one moment. He was confident and ready. But that did not take away the pain that he would experience during those 24 hours of agony.

Mark 15:37 says, "Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last." Seems so anticlimactic. But in Luke 23:46 it states, "Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' And having said this he breathed his last." With complete control of his mind, and in perfect relationship with the Father, you and I cannot fathom the pain, and agony that Jesus experienced on the cross. That is the whole point – Jesus did it for us! Let us not take for granted the penal substitution that Christ performed for us – he in our place!

FEBRUARY 5

Mark 16



HAVE YOU EVER LOOKED FORWARD TO GOING TO A SPECIAL EVENT BUT IT BECAME A HUGE DISAPPOINTMENT?.

I went to my first NCAA Final Four in 1987. My college roommate had won a lottery drawing to have the privilege to purchase tickets. My recollection is fuzzy, but I do remember that Providence, Indiana, UNLV, and Syracuse made it. We had a great time there, but the one thing I remember the most is our seats. Have you ever had to watch a basketball game with binoculars? It was held in the New Orleans Superdome and we were two rows from the top dome watching ten ants play on the floor below us.

I have often wondered how it would have been to be at the tomb on Sunday morning, Resurrection Day. Verses 2-4 say, “And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?’ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large.” Unlike my experience, which had no spiritual significance at all, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome had the experience of a lifetime! They were the first to become aware that Jesus had risen from the grave. “He is not here. See the place where they laid him” (16:6). What an incredible gift!

I believe this was a blessing to all women, who in that culture, were not treated well. Instead of figuring out how to move the stone, it was already moved -- not for Christ to get out, but for them to see in! Their first-hand account was the first of many who heard about the resurrection, saw him, and then shared that gospel news to all the world! Don’t waste any experience to share what he has done for you.

FEBRUARY 6

Luke 1:4



IN THE BEGINNING OF LUKE'S GOSPEL, HE ADDRESSES HIS WRITINGS TO THEOPHILUS, A MAN HE CALLS "MOST EXCELLENT" (1:3).

Theophilus was likely a powerful person at this time, but the reality is we don't actually know much about him – who he was or why he was so influential. Nevertheless, while this letter was addressed to Theophilus, the realities of its importance apply to all Christians today, namely that these words, the very words of God, give us certainty about what we have been taught.

Do you have doubts? Have you ever gone through days or seasons where things about God or how you should live your life seem confusing, murky, or uncertain? This is what God's word is for! Go to it, let your life be immersed in it, and have your doubts fly away.

Often times, the real source of our pain is that we listen to ourselves and our emotions instead of preaching God's Word to ourselves. But the Bible is clear, if we are to progress in sanctification, the lifelong process of dying to sin and growing in Christ-likeness, we must let the Word of God invade our life to destroy our doubts.

FEBRUARY 7

Luke 1:49-50



MARY IS EXALTING THE LORD OVER HIS FAVOR TOWARDS HER BY ALLOWING HER TO BEAR THE LORD JESUS AS HER CHILD.

Mary exalts the Lord by calling him mighty, praising his mercy towards her, and telling of his holiness. Mary was living in the reality of the Lord's present grace on her, and she was thrilled. While this was an incredibly encouraging moment in the life of Mary, she also had many other discouraging moments later on, from the death of her son, Jesus, to the many normal discouraging moments in the life of a human. How was it possible for her to handle discouragement in the future better because of moments like these? It's simple – Mary had grace to look back on, and so do we.

John Piper calls this “bygone grace”, meaning that the fuel to believe and trust God for the future is to look back in the past and remind ourselves of God's faithfulness. The Lord commanded his people throughout the Old Testament to remember the Exodus, and we too, if we are to believe and trust in Jesus today, must remember our exodus, when Jesus bought us out of slavery to sin and death and brought us into freedom in him. That is the fuel for belief today.

Will you remember the great things the Lord has done for you?

FEBRUARY 8

Luke 2:11-12



IF THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND GOD HIMSELF COMES TO THE WORLD IN HUMILITY, WILL YOU TOO, TODAY, WALK IN THE SAME WAY?

Humility becomes the Kingdom of God. God incarnate leaves his heavenly throne and comes to earth, not on chariots of fire or clothed in royalty, but humbly in a manger, which was not a whole lot more than a box for the animals to eat from. Verse 12 says that this baby, wrapped in swaddling clothing in a manger, is a sign to them of their salvation, essentially signaling that the salvation of the world came in humility.

Philippians 2 says of humility, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (2:3). Jesus, your Lord and King, came to earth in humility and counted us more significant than himself by dying in our place for our sin, giving us his righteousness, and redeeming us to God. God isn’t asking you to take on the sins of mankind, but he is asking you to walk humbly, counting others more significant than yourself. Will you do that today?

FEBRUARY 9

Luke 3:5-6



JOHN THE BAPTIST COMES ONTO THE SCENE WITH A STARK, DIRECT MESSAGE - REPENT.

But he says more than that, saying in verses five and six that crooked things will be made straight and all shall see the salvation of God. John the Baptist comes with a hard message, repent, but lays out a glorious truth, that one day, all things will be made new by this Savior.

We can look at this in two ways today: One, looking forward, and the other, looking backward. Let's start backwards.

John, when he mentions seeing the salvation of God, is obviously talking about the coming of Jesus and his eventual death, burial, and resurrection. If you trust Jesus, you too, in a way, have seen this salvation. But let's look forward.

John seems to indicate a certain newness of things, and for this, we look forward to passages like Revelation 21, which speak about the new heaven and earth and all things being made new.

Today, be encouraged that the God that saved you is making all things new and is in control of your life, even if it doesn't feel like it.

FEBRUARY 10

Luke 3:23-38



HAVE YOU MESSED UP RECENTLY? IF WE'RE HONEST WITH OURSELVES, ALL OF US HAVE.

Sinning comes natural to us, like riding a bike or tying our shoes, we are really, really good at doing what is wrong in the eyes of God. It's because of this that the Bible calls us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to fight these evil desires and actions which can and sometimes do plague us. Sometimes this fight can be discouraging, and sometimes it can just be tough to grasp onto God's love in the midst of our mistakes and shortcomings. If that's you, be encouraged by the genealogy of King Jesus.

Read through it. Notice any familiar names? Many of these people who are in the lineage of the Savior of the world made horrible mistakes in their lives. For instance, take David, a man after God's own heart, a man listed in the "hall of faith" passage of Hebrews 11, a man who also committed adultery and murder. The people who shared a bloodline with Jesus made huge mistakes, and people who God still used (and are highly honored in Scripture) really messed up too.

If God can use them, forgive them, and love them, he can and will do all the same for you, too.

FEBRUARY 11

Luke 4:1-13



HOLINESS AND OBEDIENCE ARE PLEASING TO GOD
AND WILL ULTIMATELY BRING US MORE JOY.

The stakes are high when it comes to battling sin and the grace is plentiful, therefore we should fight! But how? Thankfully, following in the example of our Lord Jesus, we have a great roadmap for how to battle temptation.

Jesus, in Luke 4, is desperately hungry, and Satan looks at this as the perfect time to tempt him, as his fleshly nature is weakened by the hunger. But Jesus is no mere man, he is also fully God and fully in line with the Father.

When tempted by Satan, Jesus responds how we should respond, “It is written...” Jesus goes to Scripture!

Are you struggling to fight sin? Are you waging war against the flesh? Go to battle with the best weapon there is, the Bible. If Jesus found it absolutely necessary to know the Bible inside and out, why do you think you can go through life any differently with any amount of spiritual life and success?

FEBRUARY 12

Luke 4:18



JESUS, SPEAKING FROM ISAIAH 61, TELLS OF HIS MISSION FROM THE SPIRIT OF GOD, TO PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS OF HIS COMING, TO FREE THE CAPTIVES, TO GIVE SIGHT TO THE BLIND, AND TO GIVE LIBERTY.

Jesus' life proclaims the truth of the gospel and proclaims the glory and wonderful power of God.

What does your life proclaim? If we are honest, our lives often times proclaim a number of things and it all revolves around our ambitions. Our lives proclaim anything from our love of money, our love of self, our love of comfort, or even our love of our religiosity.

Today, will you ask the Lord to make your life one that proclaims the truth of his gospel, the truth that frees captives and gives liberty to those enslaved to sin?

FEBRUARY 13

Luke 6:20-23



CHRIST WASN'T A BYSTANDER LEADER. HE DID NOT SEE ISSUES FROM AFAR AND GIVE GOOD ADVICE ON HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM.

Jesus took on the form of a servant in order to experience the pain of his followers. He became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9). His mother was poor (Luke 1:48). Jesus had experienced hunger, literally, but more so encouraged the spiritually hungry and thirsty to seek God (John 4:13). Jesus knew what it was to be sad and weep (John 11:32-35) and he of course knew what it was like to have people hate him, exclude him, and revile him (Mark 15:3, Matthew 27:18).

In that way we know we can trust Jesus and follow his perfect example. When things are difficult and you are hurt, struggling financially, or feeling hated for Christ's sake, be encouraged that Jesus promises that this life is not the focus, but the life to come.

FEBRUARY 14

Luke 7:36-50



WHILE SIMON HAD THE HOLY ONE, PROPHET, THE LORD OF GLORY, THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE AT HIS DINNER TABLE, HE STILL WASN'T IMPRESSED.

When the woman came to Jesus, his feet were still dirty. It was custom to wash guest's feet as they entered your home. That wasn't forgotten about here, it was ignored.

And when the woman came to Jesus, weeping, washing his feet, others were shocked at her actions, yet Simon was pleased. Pleased not because of the service, but because this proved Jesus was a fake. Surely if he was this prophet they say he is, he would know who this sinner was.

But imagine the shock when Jesus spoke of the two moneylenders, and then spoke to Simon directly. "But he who is forgiven little, loves little" (7:47). Back to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven... Your faith saved you; go in peace" (7:48, 50).

While the Pharisee was a ritually clean and incredibly religious man, he loved God little. But the woman who desperately needed the forgiveness of Jesus, loved him most.

God looks for love that is not a set of religious rules, but a passionate and heartfelt realization that we are sinners in need of a Savior.

FEBRUARY 15

Luke 8:4-8



LUKE RECOUNTS A PARABLE JESUS TOLD A GREAT CROWD THAT FOLLOWED HIM.

Jesus talks of a sower who goes into a field to sow seeds that he desires will reap a harvest. Some of the seeds he sowed were devoured by birds, other seeds withered away because they fell on rocks and had no moisture to grow up, another set of seeds fell among the thorns and were choked away by them as they grew up, and a final set of seeds fell on good soil and grew into plants that reap a plentiful harvest.

Like any of Jesus's parables, they tell a story about a spiritual truth and the spiritual truth communicated in this parable is man's response to hearing the truth of the gospel. Some people hear about Jesus but have it taken away by Satan. Others grow a little bit but have no root and fall away in times of testing. Then there are those who hear and grow, but are eventually choked away by the cares and riches and pleasures of life. But finally, there are those who are of the good soil, those who hear the Word, grow in the Word, and produce fruit for the harvest and the glory of God.

So, what soil are you?

FEBRUARY 16

Luke 8:19-21



WHEN TOLD HIS MOTHER AND BROTHERS WERE OUTSIDE WAITING ON HIM, JESUS RESPONDED, “MY MOTHER AND MY BROTHERS ARE THOSE WHO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD AND DO IT” (8:20).

What does it mean to belong to a family? For most of us, we think of belonging to a family in terms of our legal status, such as having the same last names as our family members or sharing guardians or a home. Being in a family is mostly about geographical location and where you spend your holidays as opposed to anything else in 21st century America, but when Jesus describes what belonging to a family looks like, this picture suddenly is painted differently.

How do you know you belong to the family of God? Jesus says a good indicator of that is what your obedience to his word looks like. Today, as you reflect to yourself, how would you respond to that? Can you respond with confidence, knowing your obedience has been in line with God’s Word? If you say yes, you’re actually saying no because you’re lying. We live in the tension of desiring to obey God’s Word more but knowing we don’t obey his Word enough. If you can live in that gospel tension, desiring more obedience yet knowing your obedience isn’t yet perfect and won’t be until you see Jesus in glory, then take heart, because you can rest knowing you belong to the family of God and that Jesus is your advocate.

FEBRUARY 17

Luke 9:23-27



FOLLOWING JESUS IS EASY. ISN'T IT? NO? YOU'RE RIGHT. IT'S NOT,

Jesus knows that in this life, in these fallen bodies with a heart that has been reborn to worship God, that we will have to make radical changes to follow Jesus in spirit and truth throughout this life. That's why, in Luke 9:23-27, Jesus makes a stark statement, telling us that if we are going to follow him, we must take up our own crosses and deny ourselves everyday if we are to be his disciples. What does this mean?

This means two things today: Deny your sinful impulses and ways of life that lead you away from the worship of Jesus, and cling to his cross. Taking up your cross and denying yourself often means saying no to the things you used to say yes to before you were a Christian and that is key in walking as a follower of Jesus. You can't follow Jesus without doing that. But taking up your cross can also mean looking to his cross, knowing that ultimately it's not your cross you take up that saves you, but it's his cross, his bloody, redemption-giving life and death on that cross that saves you.

Today, be challenged and encouraged – Jesus hates your sin and wants you to walk away from it, but Jesus loves you forever because the Father looks on you as he does Jesus, as pure and holy, all due to the Son's substitutionary atoning work that saved you.

FEBRUARY 18

Luke 10:1-2



THERE ARE NEARLY EIGHT BILLION PEOPLE IN THE WORLD AND WITH OUR BEST ESTIMATES, ONLY AROUND ONE TO TWO BILLION OF THOSE PEOPLE ARE ADHERENTS TO CHRISTIANITY.

If we know anything about the people in our churches and communities who claim to be Christians, we can easily assume a very healthy chunk of those people who respond to surveys and census reports claiming to follow Jesus do not follow him at all. That's an overwhelming need for the gospel to go forth, and if we are following Jesus, we have to follow him on his mission to take the gospel to all people.

In Luke 10:1-2, Jesus talks about this mission, saying the harvest is plentiful. This is clear! There are many people in need of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and Jesus says there are people in his family, future Christians, fruit to be reaped that is out there. That's exciting! There are future Christians in our region, our country, and our world. But here's the problem - the laborers are few. The need is big, but we don't have enough Christians stepping up to the plate to take the gospel where it has never gone and where darkness resides.

Today, will you pray for those people? For people in darkness and for those future Christians out there? And today, will you also pray for yourself, that the Lord would stir up in you a deep, infectious desire to take his gospel and see his gospel taken to all people?

FEBRUARY 19

Luke 11:33-37



IF YOU'VE EVER BEEN IN A CAVE, YOU KNOW WHAT THE POWER OF A LIGHT CAN BE LIKE IN DARKNESS THAT DEEP.

Turning on a flashlight or lighting a candle can illuminate the whole cave and provide a beautiful vantage point to see so much that has previously been covered in darkness. In Luke 11:33-37, Jesus talks of the same truth, saying that our eye is the lamp to our body, and that we should be careful to watch that light so it won't go out.

What does this mean and what does it mean for us? I believe Jesus is saying that we should look to him, the source of light and life, for light in our lives, and if we take our eye off him, we will wade back into darkness. For us today, we should be challenged by these words of Jesus, challenged to keep our eyes and our gaze focused on him, on his Word, and on his truth, that he is good and for us and that the fullness of life is found in him, not in any other person, thing, or idea.

Jesus is the light of life and if we continue looking to him, we know we have life in him.

FEBRUARY 20

Luke 12:22-31



HAVE YOU EVER HAD ANY ANXIETY? IF YOU'RE HUMAN, YOU DEFINITELY HAVE.

No one is immune from anxiety, and some people struggle with it greatly. Anxiety medication and therapy is a billion dollar industry and is an issue that can wreck lives if not taken seriously. Jesus knows this, and he addresses it in Luke 12. Giving many exhortations, commands, and comforts on anxiety, one specific thing he says stands out: "Seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you" (12:31).

Are you struggling with anxiety today? Seek his kingdom. Are you feeling anxious or have a situation in your future you know you'll be anxious about? Seek his kingdom. That is Jesus's main medication for anxiety. Ultimately, anxiety is a worship problem. We fear the void of security we feel from some person or thing, and Jesus says the ultimate fix to anxiety is to reorient your worship and put it on him. If you worship Jesus as your true treasure, then your true treasure and your source of security will never be lost because Jesus is never leaving you and is never forsaking you. If Jesus is your true treasure, you have a treasure who understands you deeply because he can sympathize with our weaknesses.

The call to fix your anxiety is to seek him as your treasure and to seek his kingdom in your actions, with obedience to his commands and commitment to his exaltation. Will you address your anxiety with his kingdom today?

FEBRUARY 21

Luke 13:1-5



WHEN 9/11 HAPPENED, WHERE WERE YOU THE NEXT SUNDAY?

Scores of people ran to the Church for answers, but only weeks later, the pews they filled were once again empty. When the world crumbles, it calls us to repentance, not a short-lived one, but one that lasts for the rest of our lives.

In Luke, some people approached Jesus about the atrocities of Pilate, who killed scores of Jews who had protested his use of temple money to build an aqueduct. The great indignation was that, not only did he murder many Jews, but he did it during Passover, so that literally their blood was mixed with the blood of the sacrifices. Do not misunderstand the response of Jesus. He was not showing unconcern (remember that Jesus weeps over the lostness of Jerusalem in Luke 13:34-35) but he used this situation as a plea for all of us to repent. The key verse is 13:3, “but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” The need for repentance is not just for the bad sinners; it is also for the good ones.

As you read through these verses today, where is it in your life that you need to repent? Is there hidden sin, unforgiveness, hateful words, pride, arrogance, or rebellion in your life? Do not be like the ones who ran to the Church for answers, only to go back to the way that they were once the dust settled. Repentance means that we turn from our past and turn to Christ, determining never to go back again.

FEBRUARY 22

Luke 13:22-30



THE MYSTERY OF SALVATION IS THE FACT THAT IT IS SO SIMPLE, YET SO DIFFICULT. THE QUESTION WITH WHICH MOST PEOPLE WRESTLE IS WHICH WAY IS THE TRUE WAY INTO HEAVEN?

There are a multitude of religions, all of which have some means of salvation. Which one is right? Skeptics claim that Christians are too narrow. Doubters say that the Bible does not have the corner on truth. Still others believe that they will go to heaven because they have grown up in a Christian home, went to Sunday school at one time, or got baptized.

This same problem plagued the Jews and led to the question about salvation. Many Jews believed that all Israelites would make it into heaven, unless they committed some heinous sin, and that all Gentiles would be excluded from eternal life. It is interesting that Jesus really did not answer the question as much as he responded to it with a command, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door” (13:24). His implication is that many who thought they would make it will not.

The point is that you can be surrounded by the things of God and still not be impacted by the things of God. While the external things that we do are important (baptism, church attendance, membership, etc.) those things do not provide salvation. Salvation comes because an individual personally repents of sin and surrenders to Christ as Savior and Lord. That requirement is the narrow gate. Do not make the mistake of thinking that you are headed to heaven because of your works, your goodness, or your family name. What opens heaven to us is Jesus. Do not just be around the things of God. Make sure that God is impacting your life.

FEBRUARY 23

Luke 14:1-14



AS CHRISTIANS, WE ARE TO BE NARROW REGARDING TRUTH, BUT THE BALANCE IS, OUR BELIEF IN THE BIBLE SHOULD NOT CAUSE US TO BE UNCARING TOWARD OTHERS.

The Pharisees faced that problem. Their issue was not about biblical belief. They were inerrantists. Their problem was that they had moved from conservatism to legalism, and their legalism blinded them to caring about others.

Because of this legalism and a genuine dislike for Jesus and his grace, they set up a trap. They scheduled a dinner party on the Sabbath. Jesus had reported violated the Sabbath on three previous occasions. The Pharisees sought to keep, not only the Ten Commandments, but the 613 laws found in the Old Testament. They added to these laws explanations and prohibitions that literally led to thousands of laws for the Jewish people to keep. For example, the Jewish scholars added 39 categories of work that were prohibited on the Sabbath, making up dozens of additional rules.

Therefore, they set a snare for Jesus, thinking that he could not resist the bait. Instead, Jesus confounded his accusers with this simple question, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” (14:3) If they said yes, they would appear to be soft. If they said no, they would be inhumane. Their only response was a brooding silence.

This story teaches us that a genuine belief in Scripture leads us to care about others. Be careful not to take cultural preferences and make them biblical command. The Bible is the Bible. How can you take what you believe today and use it to minister to someone else?

FEBRUARY 24

Luke 14:25-27



TAKE INVENTORY OF YOUR LIFE AND PRIORITIES. WHERE DOES JESUS FIT IN? IS HE YOUR FIRST THOUGHT AND DECISION, OR DOES HE TAKE A BACK SEAT AT TIMES?

The Christian life should be filled with distinguishing marks. In other words, people should know us as followers of Christ through both the witness that we give and through the fact that our actions match our words. Christ's teaching in 14:25-27 is a difficult teaching. Essentially what he is calling for us to do is to love him so much that our affections even for our family will seem like hate. Jesus is speaking here metaphorically (a figure of speech) using what is called a hyperbole (an exaggeration used to demonstrate an example). Literally, Jesus would not call for us to hate anyone. It would violate other commands he gave us (honor your father and mother or husbands love your wives, for example). What Jesus was saying paradoxically was that our love for him must be so great and so pervasive that our natural love of self and family pales in comparison. We are to subordinate everything, even our own being, to our love and commitment to Christ. He is to be our first loyalty. All other relationships must take second place.

To be a disciple demands that we have an absolute love for Christ. This challenge is such a difficult one, because family is so critically important. If, however, you do not love Christ first, you will not love your family properly. How can you work on that love today?

FEBRUARY 25

Luke 15:1-7



THE WORD *LOST* CONJURES ALL KINDS OF THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS FOR US.

Luke 15 offers three parables that teach us about lost. Lost is never a good feeling. This fact is especially true in the spiritual realm. Outside of Christ, we are lost, but Jesus comes to find us.

The introduction to the three parables comes out of a conversation that Jesus had with some religious leaders. For them, their self-righteousness became a hindrance to people finding God because the noise of their hypocrisy nearly drowned out the calls of God to salvation.

The lost sheep represents people who are lost, know that they are lost, but do not know what to do. God is the Shepherd who cares for the flock. When one gets away, he leaves the 99 to seek for the one. When he finds it, all of heaven rejoices “over one sinner who repents” (15:7). *Repent* is a favorite word of Luke. He uses it 25 times as a verb or as a noun in his Gospel and in Acts. It literally means “a change of mind.” To repent is to change sides.

Lost is also an important word used by Luke. In *Luke 19:10*, Jesus shows us his heart when he says, “The Son of man has come to seek and save the lost.” As Christians, we need to think much about the lost. There are those out there who are wandering, lost, and do not know what to do about it. Our challenge is to be like Jesus and find that lost sheep. Who do you know that is lost? Make a list of ten people and commit to witness to them this year. We can arrest the wandering of people through the gospel of Jesus.

FEBRUARY 26

Luke 15:8-10



IF YOU HAVE EVER LOST SOMETHING OF GREAT VALUE, YOU SPEND AN INORDINATE AMOUNT OF TIME SEARCHING FOR IT.

You may go to whatever lengths to find it. The Bible is filled with accounts of pursuing after things of great value. That is the story of the lost coin. When we are lost, God still places great value on our lives and on our salvation.

The coin teaches us that there are those people who are lost, do not know that they are lost, and therefore do not know what to do about it. The sheep was lost because of its foolishness. The coin was lost because of carelessness or oversight. For humanity, we sin because we have a nature to sin and because we then choose to sin. All of us were there at some point, and many are still there. One mission strategist determined by his research that only 13% of West Virginians are evangelical, meaning that 87% are lost – let that sink in a minute – 87% of West Virginians are without Christ and lost. And since many of them do not know what to do about it, it demands of us both a distinctiveness in how we live the Christian life and a verbal witness about that distinctiveness.

The parable teaches us two things:

1. All people are of great value to God.
2. He searches for those who are lost.

Do not forget the fact that God came searching for you. He found you, and he saved you. Never forget the value of those who are lost, treat them with respect, and share with them the gospel. Who do you know who needs Jesus today?

FEBRUARY 27

Luke 15:11-32



THIS PARABLE HAS THREE MAIN CHARACTERS: THE PRODIGAL SON (THE LOST), THE LOVING FATHER (GOD), AND THE UNFORGIVING BROTHER (THE RELIGIOUS CROWD).

The prodigal (a word meaning wasteful) was different from the other lost characters in the parables because he was lost, knew he was lost, and knew what to do about it. When he came to his senses, he went home.

Those who are outside of Christ, especially those who have had an exposure to Christianity or to the gospel, will go through times of conviction whereby the Holy Spirit speaks to them and brings them home. The difficult teaching of this parable is the fact that sometimes God lets us go. God searches for us, but he also lets us go when we intentionally walk away from him.

The main focus of the story is loving Father who waits at home with an unloving son. That son reminds us, as ones who claim to know God, to examine our faith carefully. He never strayed, but what we learn is that you can be around spiritual things and they never affect you. You can allow self-righteousness to get in the way of seeing people come to faith in Christ, and perhaps your own salvation. You can also become resentful to God.

The loving Father, however, demonstrates how God's forgiveness is still available. The Father waits, but when the son turns to the Father for forgiveness, it was granted. Whether you are far away or you are the son at home, when you turn to the Father, you find forgiveness. Sometimes we are prodigals – we are lost, know that we are lost, and the good news is, we know what to do. Come back home – the Father is waiting.

FEBRUARY 28

Luke 16:19-31



AS BIBLICAL AUTHORITY HAS WEAKENED OVER TIME, SO HAS THE BELIEF IN A PLACE OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT FOR THOSE WHO REJECT CHRIST.

It is a subject with which everyone struggles because hell is a place, not only for the very wicked, but even for our friends and family who have rejected Christ. That reality is so very difficult.

Jesus tells this story of the rich man and Lazarus. Many scholars call it a parable. Others say that, while it is written like a parable, it is in all actuality a real situation. The reason is because Jesus uses the name of Lazarus. The rich man was a real person, as was Lazarus. Lazarus died and went to Abraham's side (a biblical phrase for heaven) and the rich man went to Hades. Hades is the abode of the dead and is a word that Jesus uses synonymously with hell. It is found four times in the Gospels, all spoken by Jesus. And notice what happened there. He cried out to Abraham because "I am in agony in this flame!" (16:24). It is a fire that burns (torments) but does not consume. It is a word that Jesus uses to define for us the great agony of hell.

Here's a good definition of hell – it is the place of the presence of the judgment of God and the absence of the presence of God. The reality check for us is: 1. Do you know Jesus personally? 2. And be absolutely burdened about the lost condition of your friends and family. Hell is real. Did you make a list of ten people you know who may be lost? Have you developed any gospel conversations with them yet? Keep going and do not give up.

MARCH 1

Luke 17:11-19



WE HAVE ALL SEEN AND PROBABLY DEMONSTRATED AT DIFFERENT TIMES AN UNGRATEFUL HEART, NOT JUST TOWARD OTHERS, BUT TOWARD GOD.

In 1863, Abraham Lincoln told a nation headed to destruction to a fast day, proclaiming, "... We have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!"

A truly thankful heart is not just one that enjoys the benefits of blessing but acknowledges openly the source of those blessings. In Luke 17, Jesus encounters ten lepers. Leprosy was an incurable and usually fatal disease. Lepers were outcasts of society and were required by law to cover their mouths, growth their hair long, tear their clothes, and cry out openly that they were unclean. To be healed would be no small miracle. Nine of the lepers healed obeyed Jesus by going to the Jewish priest to be declared clean. One, however, returned to give thanks.

Here's how you can develop a grateful heart like that:

1. Personally reflect on God's goodness.
2. Be sincerely obedient to God's Word.
3. Demonstrate a personal faith in God's Son.

How can you apply these truths to your life today?

MARCH 2

Luke 18: 9-14



LUKE 18 CONTAINS SEVERAL PARABLES AND A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER THAT JESUS HAD WITH A YOUNG JEWISH MAN.

One question in all of these situations is, what proves that a person is righteous? For many Jews, righteousness was merely keeping rules and regulations. It was outward, legalistic, and prideful. The Jews had mistakenly interpreted the fact that, because they were the chosen people of God, they were better than others or that they were the only ones whom God wanted. The problem, though, was that their pride actually kept them from God.

True righteousness is something that comes from the heart. Biblically, we understand that Jesus is the One who makes us righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21) and declares that we are righteous (Ephesians 1:4). Righteousness defined means the outward expression of God's change in our hearts reflected in conduct and relationships. Holiness is the inward quality of being distinctive and separate. Righteousness is the outward expression of that inward holiness.

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector demonstrates this fact. The Pharisee was proud of what he did. He prayed, he avoided sinful people, and he fasted. How many times have we done those things and even bragged (masking them in a false humility)? The tax collector, the lowest of the lowest, was broken and humble. He cried out for God's mercy because he was a sinner (and he was). Jesus declared that he was the one who left justified. It was an interesting story. True righteousness is not just the things we do on the outside. It comes from a broken, humble spirit that recognizes our sinfulness and that God is the only hope.

MARCH 3

Luke 19:1-10



LUKE 19 INTRODUCES TO US ANOTHER TAX COLLECTOR, THIS ONE NAMED ZACCHAEUS.

It is one of the most popular stories in the Bible. Jesus is headed to Jerusalem for the last time. He was going there to die. At least three times (found in Mark's Gospel) Jesus has openly declared his coming sacrifice.

Thus, Jesus is headed to Jerusalem to die for the sins of the world, but it does not keep him from being concerned about the individual. Do not miss that fact here. The contrast is so interesting. The crowd, the righteous people, were merely spectators and were angry that Jesus dealt with Zacchaeus. They should have been thrilled that this tax collector was dramatically changed. You and I probably miss God so many times because we get so caught up in our own self-righteousness that we never see our own sin and see how God can change us.

Zacchaeus did not miss this opportunity. He met Jesus, and both he and his family were radically saved. Here's why: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost" (19:10).

When you think of your relationship with God, how does it make you respond? Does it conjure up thoughts of pride and accomplishment? Or are you humbled by the fact that you would be nothing without God? And then does it lead you to love those outside of Christ, those whose lives are wrecked by sin, and those who are struggling in their faith? To truly be a follower of Christ demands that we have the same heart as Jesus – to see the lost saved and changed!

MARCH 4

Luke 22:7-23



AN ORDINANCE IS A COMMAND OF CHRIST THAT WE OBEY AS A MATTER OF CHURCH PRACTICE. IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH, THERE ARE TWO ORDINANCES THAT THE CHURCH OBSERVES.

The first is believer's baptism, whereby someone who has repented of sin and trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord is immersed in water. The water symbolizes death to sin and a new life in Christ.

The second ordinance is called the Lord's Supper. Its purpose is to remind believers of the significance of Christ's sacrifice and death. Luke 22 gives us an account of Jesus' observance of Passover and his establishing of the practice of the Lord's Supper. Passover was an incredibly significant time for the Jews; it was one of the feasts that they celebrated. It reminded them of when God delivered Israel from the Egyptians as death took all of the firstborn of Egypt through the last plague that God brought upon Pharaoh for hardening his heart. The Israelites, however, were instructed to sacrifice a lamb and spread its blood over the entrances to their homes. When death came, it passed over the homes of the Jews.

When Jesus declared his public ministry, John the Baptist proclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). As the lamb was slain and its blood shed to save the Jews from death, Jesus shed his blood for us. The Bible clearly states, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin" (Hebrews 9:22), and the fact that "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (Ephesians 1:7). When your church observes this ordinance, take care in participating in it. It is a beautiful reminder of what Jesus did for us.

MARCH 5

Luke 23:33-38



LUKE'S GOSPEL GIVES US A GLIMPSE INTO THE INTIMATE MOMENTS AS JESUS DIED FOR OUR SINS.

He records the very words that Jesus spoke on the cross. One of the first of these expressions was the forgiveness that Jesus expressed toward his accusers and those who crucified him. Imagine that! Forgiving those who reject you.

Forgiving others, especially those who have hurt you deeply, is one of the most difficult demands that we have on us as believers. It is possible for us to experience forgiveness, but it is also possible for us to forgive those who hurt us.

Crucifixion was the common form of punishment, though banned for a Roman citizen, from the sixth century BC until it was outlawed by Constantine in AD 337. It was an excruciating form of punishment, leaving the accused suffering for hours and some for days. To demonstrate how sinful people are, even one of the men crucified with Christ reviled him, as did those who watched His crucifixion. Yet Jesus words were ones of grace, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing" (23:34).

These would be the same words spoken by Stephen when he was stoned to death for preaching the gospel as recorded in Acts 7:60. Father, forgive them. These should also be the words spoken by us. As you evaluate your walk with Jesus, who is it that has hurt you? How does that hurt hinder your walk with Christ, and how much unforgiveness do you bear? Take time today to remember that Christ's sacrifice is enough. He is your protector and defender. Those who have hurt you will answer to him. Therefore, forgive them. It's not your battle anymore.

MARCH 6

Luke 23:39-43



ONE OF THE GREAT UNCERTAINTIES OF LIFE IS WHAT HAPPENS TO US AFTER DEATH.

Some say that we cease to exist. Others, even those who do not believe in God, hope that there is something more – but is there? The words of Jesus to this thief on the cross answer that question for us.

The visual is that Jesus is crucified equally between these two thieves. And yet they are distinctively different. One rejects Christ while the other receives Christ. One represents a life of failure – the other a response of faith. But what they ultimately show – in fact the entire picture of 23:32-43 is that Jesus died for all – that salvation is available to all – to the criminal, the religious, the scoffer, and the critic.

The words of this criminal ring loudly in our ears – we are punished justly. These two men quite possibly were co-conspirators with Barabbus. This one criminal, in admitting his own sinfulness, opened the door for him to know Christ as Savior.

The repentant criminal responds to Christ, “Jesus, remember me when you enter into your kingdom” (23:42). It was a last-minute confession, but here is where you see the greatness of the grace of God. Jesus says, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (23:43). His confession of sin and trust in Christ was accepted. The one thief died and entered into an eternity without God. This man left this earth as a thief but entered eternity as a saint. Thank God today for this promise of eternal life, for all who repent and believe. If you do not know Christ, the opportunity to know him is available. Repent and make Jesus your Savior and Lord today.

MARCH 7

Luke 24:1-12



MOST EVERYONE IS LOOKING FOR LIFE – LIFE OF SOME KIND. WE TRY RELIGION, MONEY, EDUCATION, CAREERS, OR RELATIONSHIPS, YET NOT OF THESE THINGS WORK.

Where do we find life – and especially life that is worth living and life that is eternal? That life is what the people discovered at the empty tomb. The angel asked, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” (24:5). We find life because Jesus is alive.

Luke opens Chapter 24 by telling us of the women who headed toward the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus with spices. The Gospel of Mark reveals the conversation that the women were having as they headed toward the tomb. They did not know what had happened yet. The fact is, the tomb had been sealed and had soldiers standing guard. They certainly would not help a group of mourning Jewish women.

God, though, had already taken care of the problem. When you read the gospel accounts, you can see what was going on. An earthquake occurred and angels arrive to roll the stone away. Though we have heard it a million times, it is important to remember that the stone was rolled away, not to let Jesus out but to let the disciples in. The obstacles that prevented the women from carrying out their desired task were not only overcome, but it was taken well beyond what they could have thought or imagined. They came to anoint the body of Jesus. They found something much better. Jesus was raised from the dead – just as he promised.

Take time today to thank God for the resurrection of Jesus. Because he lives, we live also.

MARCH 8

Overview: John 20:31



AS A CHILD WHEN I'D COME HOME AFTER SCHOOL, I'D RETRIEVE THE "HIDDEN" KEY TO UNLOCK THE FRONT DOOR OF OUR HOME.

If you'd have come and attempted to enter you'd have found the door locked and secure. I, on the other hand, knew where the key was and thereby had full access to the house. Reading our Bibles can often be like that experience. Approaching a book we come with questions and concerns. What is this book about? Who wrote it? Why was it written? What genre is this? What are the main ideas? How do I deal with the challenging passages? If only there were a "key" to let us in and give us access to the precious goods, safety, and security inside.

Thankfully for us the beloved disciple, John, left the key out in plain sight for each of us. As we approach John's Gospel we realize these 21 chapters aren't just for beginners, rather this is a pool that's both shallow enough for us to wade in and deep enough for us to drown. John, in 20:31 states, "...but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." Pulling no punches, John makes his key abundantly clear. All of his Gospel is written that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name. Simply, John's Gospel is *all about Jesus*.

As you begin your journey through this marvelous account keep 20:31 close. May these words be the lenses with which you see all of John's words. As you begin reading, ask the Lord for help to let you see these beautiful words. See and believe!

MARCH 9

Overview: *John 21:25*



HAVE YOU EVER HAD TO TELL THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH, AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH? CULTURE HAS FRAMED THAT STATEMENT FOR US TO UNDERSTAND TRUTH ACCORDING TO LEGALITY.

Think globally for a moment across the 21 chapters of John's Gospel. This is a book filled with *testimonies*. As you read the pages of John's account you get a *testimony* from individuals, groups, and even Jesus himself. These words provide pictures, evidence, and trustworthy accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. Each is carefully given in order that you would believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that by believing you would have life in his name. Seeing John's Gospel through the lens of 20:31 provides the angle of interpretation we so desperately need and at the same time ties each and every testimony together. Both Nicodemus in Chapter 3 and the Samaritan woman in Chapter 4 have colorful encounters with Jesus and at the same time provide you, me, and every reader evidence that mounts up to belief in Jesus.

As you begin to read through John's Gospel in these days take time to consider the numerous testimonies that are given. John the Baptist (Chapter 1), Andrew, Nathaniel, Philip (Chapter 1), the disciples (Chapter 2), the official (Chapter 4), Jesus (Chapter 5), 5,000 people (Chapter 6), and the accounts continue through the final words. John closes his book with the reality that the story of Jesus and his work in people can't be contained on the written page. The very reality that you're studying John's Gospel today gives testimony that John 21:25 is true. Celebrate that Jesus, through John's writings, has made himself known to you today!

MARCH 10

John 6:35, 8:12, 10:11, 10:11, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1, 8:58



A STATEMENT IS COMMUNICATION OR A DECLARATION IN SPEECH OR WRITING, SETTING FORTH FACTS.

We live in a day where definitions seem to be flexible and facts can be modified with the word “alternative”. While this may be convenient of the culture we’re currently in, it’s not helpful and simply, it doesn’t measure up. The Bible isn’t flexible and its words aren’t alternative, so when the words of Scripture are read and spoken they are plain, straightforward, and true. John, the Apostle, was no stranger to polarizing statements. The words he wrote gave clarity to who God is, who man is, and how the two relate to one another. In fact, John provides eight statements that define and give shape to the person and work of Jesus. Certainly, these statements don’t belong to John, they are Jesus’ words. Jesus outlines and fills in his work, his character, his person, and his mission by providing what we know as the “I AM” statements of Jesus. Whether you study “the bread of life,” “the light of the world,” “the true vine,” or any of the other statements you quickly see Jesus was deadly serious about tying himself directly to the Great I AM of Exodus 3:14 in a way that wasn’t fuzzy, modified, or flexible.

Jesus, in these statements, claims divinity and demonstrates supremacy. The words in these classic lines set forth fact – life changing declarations. These are given to you that you would believe that Jesus is God. Take time and read the “I AM” statements today. How can the truthfulness of these words impact your day, your mindset, your relationships, your work, and essentially all of your life?

MARCH 11

John 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 20



VISUAL PEOPLE NEED VISUAL CUES. THOSE CUES ARE OFTEN IN THE FORM OF SIGNS.

The 70's brought a song that simply stated, "signs, signs, everywhere a sign." As we continue our journey through John's Gospel we can get an idea that the work of Jesus is miraculous on multiple levels. The reality of God dwelling with men alone is staggering. Then John begins to recount the work of Jesus and the miraculous nature of it. One of the challenges with seeing signs is that we can see a sign and miss the point of the sign. John carefully curates his Gospel to record specific, powerful, and life-alerting miracles that change the course of immediate and future history.

Think for a moment through John's writings – water to wine, healing, feeding thousands, walking on water, resurrection. How could these things possibly be? Why are these accounts given? To force us to pause and figure out empirically, scientifically, mathematically how these things happened? No! These miracles weren't given as case studies to develop us as investigators and researchers. John provides these signs to show us the way to Jesus. John is pleading with his readers to believe that Jesus is God and that by believing that Jesus is God his readers will experience real life, eternal life! Signs were never given simply to marvel over any more than navels were give to gaze upon. The signs recorded across the pages of John's Gospel are given that your heart would be with a white-hot worship of the God who's come to live among us, die for us, rise in victory, and claim his reward - your worship and your life!

MARCH 12

John 1:1-5



POLITICS... RELATIONSHIPS... PARENTING...
VOCATION... FINANCE... WHAT'S IN A WORD?
WHAT IS A WORD?

Have you ever thought about nothing but words? Have you labored over which words to write in a card, text, email? Have you ever delivered a speech? There are so many words. How do you define words? Are meanings flexible, personal, cultural, or relative? If we can't trust words, can we trust people? Randy Alcorn said, "We tend to start with earth and reason up toward Heaven when instead we should start with Heaven and reason down toward earth." Those words force us to make a decision about authority. Whose word is final?

John, the Apostle, had the question settled for him by the advent of Jesus in his life. John in his first words of his account of the life of Jesus makes several bold statements about the "Word". First he states the Word is eternal (1:1-2). This Word John speaks of has no beginning and no end. He ties the Word to Genesis 1:1. There's no backstory, no birth, no baptism – simply the Word has always existed. Secondly, he declares the word is creator (1:3). Colossians 1:15-20 and Romans 11:36 both support John's words in affirming that Jesus is the source and center of creation. Nothing has been made that was not made by him. Finally, we see that the Word is life (1:4-5). "Life" is mentioned 36 times in John's Gospel. This life looks back to creation and forward to salvation. John contrasts this life with an understanding of death. Life only comes by the Word.

Over and over the reader is prompted to ask himself, "do you believe this?" Believing that Jesus is eternal, creator, and life is no small commitment. When we believe, everything changes. Do you believe this *Word*?

MARCH 13

John 1:6-13



THE BIBLE TEACHES US ABOUT LIGHT FROM COVER TO COVER. THIS IS A THEME THAT'S IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT DECLARES BOTH THE CHARACTER OF GOD AND OUR POSITION OF NEED.

Light is mentioned over 240 times within the pages of the Bible. This Gospel in particular is focused on Jesus, the light of the world, and belief in his name.

J.C. Ryle put it this way, "Christ is to the souls of men what the sun is to the world. He is the center and source of all spiritual light, warmth, life, health, growth, beauty, and fertility. Like the sun, He shines for the common benefit of all mankind - for high and for low, for rich and for poor, for Jew and for Greek. Like the sun, He is free to all. All may look at Him, and drink health out of His light. If millions of mankind were mad enough to dwell in caves underground, or to bandage their eyes, their darkness would be their own fault, and not the fault of the sun. So, likewise, if millions of men and women love spiritual 'darkness rather than light,' the blame must be laid on their blind hearts, and not on Christ. 'Their foolish hearts are darkened.' (John 3:19; Romans 1:21). But whether men will see or not, Christ is the true sun, and the light of the world. There is no light for sinners except in the Lord Jesus."

Take time today and be warmed, melted, healed, convicted, grown, and loved by the *Light of the World*, Jesus Christ.

MARCH 14

John 1:14-18



THEOLOGICAL TOPICS CAN BE CUMBERSOME, DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND, AND DIVISIVE.

Nevertheless, we can't avoid these deep, precious truths because they cause us to think deeply, speak carefully, and act gracefully toward each other. John in 1:14-18 deals with the subject of the incarnation. Essentially, the *incarnation* is the Second Person of the Trinity – Jesus, without giving up his deity, became a human being. Many of us have so long ago embraced this truth that it fails to shake us, stun us, and put us in a position of awe. The incarnation of the Son of God teaches us that Jesus is with us, Jesus is grace for us, and that Jesus is truth to us. We experience God through Jesus. Because of our rebellion and sinfulness we could not go to God. We've attempted it across history. Consider Babel: we labored together to build a structure to ascend to heaven. Consider the enlightenment: we reasoned together and established intellectual structures to ascend to heaven. Neither worked historically and they aren't sufficient presently. Like men and women of years gone by we are in desperate need of God to come to us.

You don't have to read Athanasius' "On the Incarnation" (although you should) to see the monumental significance of Jesus coming to earth. You can read John's Gospel. Look at the testimonies from people when they encounter the God-Man. Lives are radically reoriented and remade. Historical accounts remind us that God specializes in rescuing the perishing and transforming the wretched. This is all due to the fact that Jesus became like us, perishing and wretched, yet was not rescued in order that we might be. "God With Us" is an indispensable doctrine that leads us to heartfelt worship and life changing gratitude.

MARCH 15

John 1:19-37



CHARLES GRAFTON PAGE, CROMWELL VARLEY, ELISHA GRAY... ANY IDEA WHO THESE INDIVIDUALS ARE OR WHAT THEY DID? WHAT ABOUT ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL?

Each of these men was instrumental in the development of the telephone. We may remember the last name and tie him to the invention of our modern telephone, but one would have to ask would any of these men be satisfied with simply being the inventor? Weren't they after something more? Certainly, the telephone was a catalyst for technology and communication, but when you whittle away everything you're left simply with the message. The phone was invented to talk, to give a message.

John 1:19-37 brings John the Baptist into focus. In a time when people were looking for a messiah, hope, and truth, an untamed long haired throwback to the wilderness prophet arrives with one message and it had nothing to do with him. Like his contemporaries we often focus on the life of John the Baptist, which would have grieved him both then and now. John had one point, one job. John existed that others would know Jesus. His words thunder across history, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (1:29). It's as if John, in his gruff and tender way, places your face within his hands and gently, yet firmly turns your head away from his face and forces you to look at Jesus. "Look!" he says emphatically.

John knew Jesus and John knew the point of his life. John's point was Jesus. What's yours? What is your life pointing others toward? Maybe more personally, what is your life pointing toward? You can't show others Jesus unless you're *beholding* him yourself.

MARCH 16

John 2:12-25



WE'RE NOT DIFFERENT THAN PEOPLE SEEKING A SIGN IN THE FIRST CENTURY. WE WANT GOD TO DO SOMETHING TO PROVE HIS LOVE AND PROVISION FOR US.

"So the Jews said to him, 'What sign do you show us for doing these things?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken" (2:18-22).

What's the temple? It is the place where God dwells. That is Jesus. What is the temple? It is the place where sin is atoned for. That is in Jesus. What is the temple? It is the place where people come to worship God. That is in Jesus. What is the temple? That is the place where the priest intercedes for people before God. That is in Jesus who is our great high priest and our intercessor and our advocate. All of this happens in Jesus. And Jesus essentially says, "You have wasted your time thinking that the temple will do for you what only I can accomplish. And so if you want to see a miracle, kill me, and I will raise from the dead. And this simple, 33-year-old, human temple that is where God is present on this planet will demonstrate my authority."

We say, "Show us a sign! Show us you're worthy of us coming to worship you! Show us that you're valuable to bring an offering to!"

Jesus responds today as he did all those years ago, "The greatest sign/miracle I can show you is the love I've demonstrated for you."

MARCH 17

John 3:1-15



HAVE YOU EVER HAD THE FEELING WHEN YOU APPROACH A PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE THAT YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH THAT YOU CAN JUST GLANCE OVER IT BECAUSE YOU'VE ALREADY COVERED IT?

Many of us cruise through the text with speed and agility that often leads us to pass by what God has for us. The story of Nicodemus can be very familiar. Sermons, devotionals, studies, you name it, he's covered there. He's the educated and spiritual man that received the helpful lecture from Jesus about the Old Testament and the second birth. For a moment though let's place our focus on Jesus in the passage. Jesus patiently listens, teaches, welcomes, and guides. His rebuke is centered on love and aimed at redemption. His correction is dripping with grace and saturated with Scripture. The actions of Jesus changed Nicodemus forever. What was the basic work of Jesus in those moments? He simply was drawing Nicodemus' eyes to himself. Simply, "Look at me Nicodemus."

In that moment it all came together for Nicodemus. He realized Jesus was the one who would be lifted up. It all came together for him in that moment. God would bring Nicodemus to his kingdom, but not because of Nicodemus, but because of God. All Nicodemus had to do was **look**. Look to the Son of Man and be saved.

Nicodemus didn't necessarily have to have 3:16 he had 3:15 – that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Nicodemus realized on that day the SON OF MAN is the SON OF GOD and the SON OF GOD is IMMANUEL – GOD WITH US!

MARCH 18

John 3:16



OUR EYES MUST BE OPENED TO THOSE IN NEED OF JESUS, BUT FIRST OUR HEARTS MUST BE MELTED BY THE VERY LOVE OF JESUS.

Years ago, the Baptist preacher C.H. Spurgeon said, “Oh, my brothers and sisters in Christ, if sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies and if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay, and not madly to destroy themselves. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for.”

What motivates a man to make a statement like that? Does it start with a love for the lost? Does it emanate from the heat rising from the pits of hell? Could it be from a slavish commitment to the work of evangelism? Certainly, each of those could be a factor, but more aptly this heart rises from the deep, deep love of God. Spurgeon never got far from the words of the Apostle John in 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Spurgeon didn’t think anyone else needed this truth from him before it was saturated in him.

John 3:16 is not a verse given to us that we would respond in going, rather it’s given to us that we’d respond in receiving. The Bible is littered with commands to go and tell, but this is not one of them primarily. These words are pregnant with the love of God for you. God’s love for you will compel you to carry God’s love to others. The very love of God you receive is the very love of God you give. Consider that for a moment and allow the flames of white-hot worship to drive you to erupt in praise and then be sent in mission.

MARCH 19

John 4:27-42



IT'S HERE WHERE JOHN IS DOING HIS FINEST WORK.

If you follow the progression of thought you see that Jesus, in the eyes of others, moves from a normal man, to a powerful teacher, to a deliverer of a people, and ultimately the Savior of the World. Don't miss the definite article there in 4:42. John put it in there for a reason. He wants his readers to know the importance of this man specifically...this Jesus is the one, the only, the unique, Son of God through whom, by believing in him, eternal life is given!

It's important that we see this progression because without seeing that arc of intent we run the risk of making this passage overly personal, overly me centered, and potentially devoid of the magnificent power and truth contained within.

This portion of Scripture reveals at least two truths which corroborate Jesus' claim of being the Messiah. First, Jesus is always on time (4:27). The first two words in verse 27 seem rather insignificant when we read this passage quickly, but if you slow down and consider those two words we'll see the impeccability of Jesus' timing and his control of circumstances. Jesus is in control of all things. Nothing happens without him and everything happens with him.

Second, Jesus is worthy of worship (4:28-29, 39). We can't forget that the Samaritans were outcast, social rejects. They could be likened to modern day refugees. No one wanted them, they found solidarity and care only in themselves and they were constantly looked down upon. And of all places, this is where Jesus reveals he's the Messiah! The hope we gather from a passage like this is enough to make you marvel, worship, and confess that Jesus is the Savior of the World!

These two truths show us that Jesus is never late and always loving.

MARCH 20

John 6:1-15



THIS PASSAGE, LIKE SEVERAL OTHERS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL, LEAVES US EITHER REALLY OR PROVERBIALY, SCRATCHING OUR HEADS.

It's almost a literary double take – *did I just read what I thought I read?* Yes, John 6, along with Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:32–44; Luke 9:10–17, all say that Jesus *fed* 5,000 men with five loaves and two fish.

Jesus, after an incredible ministerial run (think water, wine, healings, etc.) is looking for rest. He heads to a mountain retreat for some R&R and after arriving outside of town he turns around and the town has set up shop outside of his villa. Matthew tells us he saw them coming, was moved with compassion, so he healed them, taught them, and then... fed them...with a Lunchable!

This passage shows us that people are the point, problems are opportunities, and Jesus is always the answer. Not every test in our lives is designed to show how much we know and how great our abilities are. Some tests are designed to show our weaknesses – to show where we need care, help, healing, and ultimately Jesus. On this day Jesus asked his disciples to solve a problem that was far too big for them to handle. There was only one answer, “We can’t, but you can.” Instead of faith they turned to flesh. Jesus, in grace, teaches them the aim of life, problems, and ultimately worship.

Our problems provide us the opportunity to answer according to our flesh (self) or according to our faith (Jesus). What’s in view for you at the moment that you’ve exhausted your resources on? How can you decide today to put what little you have in the hands of Jesus and patiently wait for him to work as only he can? That’s the very place where lunchboxes are transformed into banquet tables.

MARCH 21

John 8:58



AS CHILDREN, MANY OF US ASKED MORE QUESTIONS THAN OUR PARENTS CARED TO ANSWER OR COULD POSSIBLY KEEP UP WITH.

Questions reveal. Questions educate. Questions help us understand. As we look at the landmark statement of Jesus in John 8:58 several questions are in order. Questions like, “Who does Jesus think he is?” and “Who do you think Jesus is?”

Each question is important but none more so than the first. Jesus identifies himself as the God of the Old Testament. He is not just rattling cages, he’s demonstrating deity. Jesus is saying, “Unlike the gods of the east or of the west, I am, simply because I am.” Eastern religions will say, “God is because God is the emanation of the life force of the universe,” or in western religions, the gods would always arise out of sort of the raw material of the universe and the deeps of time.

Jesus says, “No, no, no, no. I am self-existence. I am self-determined. I am not caused. In a sense, I do not exist; I am existence. I depend on nothing and no one. Everything that exists depends on me.” Do you see? “I have no beginning. I couldn’t have begun. If I would have begun, something would have caused me. I am the cause of all causes. I’m the uncaused cause. I am transcendent above the universe. I existed before there was a universe. There’s no beginning, no ending, to me.”

It’s imperative for Jesus to be clear about who he knows himself to be. That reality gives rise to clarity for you and me as we come to understand him as he is, not as we fashion him to be. We know who Jesus said he was; we see from John 8 what his listeners thought of him, but what about you? What do you think of Jesus? Who do you think Jesus is?

MARCH 22

John 10:11



SHEPHERDS LEAD. SHEPHERDS TEACH. SHEPHERDS PROVIDE. SHEPHERDS PROTECT.

People wanted a winner because they wanted to win. A ruler because they wanted to rule. A conqueror because they wanted to conquer. A deliverer because they wanted to be delivered. But one of their own making. The only problem with wanting something of your own making is that's a functional definition of idolatry.

God's people at the time of John's writing were living under the rule of the Roman empire. They felt oppressed, discounted, and marginalized. They wanted a strong leader who would bring victory and reestablish the Davidic Kingdom. This wasn't in and of itself a bad desire, but how they wanted it done was more focused on themselves than on the God who would lead, teach, provide for, and protect them.

In calling himself a shepherd, Jesus aligns himself with men from the Old Testament – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Job, and David. Throughout Israel's history, shepherding had always been a familiar part of everyday agrarian life. The people all knew that sheep are the most helpless and dirty of animals. They require constant oversight, leading, rescue, and cleaning or they will die. In calling himself a shepherd, Jesus aligns himself with personalities of the OT and demonstrates he's every aspect of Shepherd they couldn't be. Abraham lied; Jesus is truth. Isaac showed favoritism; Jesus serves all. Joseph was proud; Jesus is humble. Moses was fearful; Jesus was courageous. Job was dependent; Jesus is dependable. David left his sheep; Jesus loved his sheep. Jesus is a better Abraham. Isaac. Jacob. Joseph. Moses. Job. David. Shepherd.

Jesus is better because he is good. In Mark 10 Jesus asked why the rich young man called him good. Jesus went on to teach God, and only God, is the Good Shepherd, who lovingly suffers in our place for our sins.

MARCH 23

John 11:1-38



WE LEARN MANY THINGS ABOUT OUR LORD IN THIS STORY THAT FEATURES LAZARUS AND HIS TWO SISTERS, MARY AND MARTHA.

The story takes place in a village on the Mount of Olives called Bethany. The narrative reveals Jesus' love for his people. The two sisters recognized the genuine love that Jesus had for their brother when they sent word to him about Lazarus being ill (11:3,5, 33-38). I believe this gives us insight in how Christ loves his own: he is keenly aware of the details of their lives, their needs, and their heartaches and is moved to give them comfort (cf. Psalm 23; Hebrews 4:14-16).

This section of Scripture also demonstrates God's sovereignty and his passion for his glory. Jesus makes it clear that God is actively working and ordaining these events with his statement in verse 4: "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." (cf. Romans 11:36). It also shows he has authority over death in calling his friend to life after Lazarus had been dead for four days. Jesus declares himself to be the resurrection and the life! He says to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? (11:25-26)"

These truths have long been a source of deep and abiding hope to many of God's children. All of these realities of Jesus' character come together when he says to Martha: "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" (11:40). He prays to his Father and calls his beloved friend forth from the grave. To God be all glory and praise!

MARCH 24

John 11:39-57



JOHN'S FOLLOWUP TO THE LAZARUS NARRATIVE IS VERY INTERESTING.

He records the response to Jesus' miracle of raising his friend from the dead: Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do?" (11:45-47).

These reactions are still common today as man is confronted with Christ: some believe, some reject, some simply ponder how to deal with him. As the rest of Chapter 11 unfolds, I am reminded of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost: "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know-- this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:22-23).

Little did these religious leaders know that they were actually carrying out the sovereign plan of God as they made plans to put him to death (11:53). Even the words spoken by Caiaphas the high priest, it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish, are unknowingly true. He makes the statement because he saw Jesus as a political scapegoat who might shield the Jews from Roman punishment. But John, as he often does, uses the statement as a means to show the nature of Christ's substitutionary atonement. Our hearts rejoice as we see Jesus, in the face of adversity, continue his journey to Jerusalem, where he would die for us so that we would not perish!

MARCH 25

John 12 (Palm Sunday)



THIS MUST HAVE BEEN AN ANTICIPATED DAY FOR OUR SAVIOR.

On this day he would make his climatic entry into Jerusalem as he makes his final movements toward the cross and his sufferings. He had repeatedly warned his disciples that he would suffer and now, that time was before him. Jerusalem was filled with visitors anticipating the Passover celebration. The crowds would press in upon Jesus as he entered the city. His authoritative teaching and miraculous works, including the recent raising of Lazarus (12:17), had created quite the buzz.

Let your attention be drawn not to the words of the crowd in this moment, but to the actions of Jesus. With the crowd in a tizzy and echoing Psalms 113-118 with their cries, Jesus sits on a donkey. Did you expect that? In what might seem like an odd moment in the narrative, John, the inspired writer, gives us some theological commentary to help us, the readers. Jesus was making a significant point as he declared himself the fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9. Jesus did not ride on a war horse, but a colt. The colt was a symbol of peace, not power. Everything the crowd expected, Jesus was not. He rode a donkey, speaking to the fact that he was a humble king, meek and lowly, there to conquer death, not Rome. He did not come to bring the end to some temporal political power, but to bring an end to Satan's tyranny. The sword was not the answer to solve this catastrophic problem, only a cross could bring true, eternal peace. On that day, the humble Son of God rode into Jerusalem to reconcile sinners to his Holy Father. In due time, Jesus will once again ride into Jerusalem, but instead of bringing peace he will be mounted on a war horse to bring judgment (Revelation 19).

MARCH 26

John 13



EVERY YEAR MANY CHURCHES SET ASIDE THE THURSDAY OF PASSION WEEK TO CELEBRATE WHAT IS CALLED “MAUNDY THURSDAY.”

This celebration is derived from a Latin phrase, “mandatum novum,” which means new commandment. The command to love others is not new. Leviticus 19:18 clearly exhorts the people of God to love your neighbor as yourself. The “newness” of this command is in regard to the standard in which they are to love one another, “as Christ has loved them” (John 13:34).

This is the pinnacle of New Testament ethics for the follower of Christ. To love our brothers and sisters as we have been loved by Christ. We cannot fulfill Christ’s command unless we first understand Christ’s love for us. So we must ask, how has Christ loved us? Take a minute and think through this answer.

Christ has loved you, the sinner, with an unprovoked love. You did nothing to cause Jesus to love you. Instead, we gave (and continue to give) him every reason to not love us. You have not only unearned his love but you have instead merited his wrath. Christ has loved you with a generous love. He is not stingy or tightfisted with his love. He does not hold back. He laid down his life for you, he suffered under the curse of God for you. He is not half-heartedly devoted to you, he is all in when it comes to his love for you. Christ has loved you with a faithful love. Jesus is not going to forsake you. His love is not fickle nor flighty.

Now, the command forces you to consider not only Christ’s love for you, but to also consider that this is how you are to love one another. This is how the world will know that you are a follower of Jesus! (13:35)

MARCH 27

John 14



IBET YOU ARE LIKE ME. IT'S 2 A.M., YOU WAKE UP, AND THE FIRST THING THAT ENTERS YOUR MIND IS SOME TROUBLING ASPECT OF YOUR LIFE.

Maybe it is a health, relational or financial issue. Whatever the case, it is a major cause of stress and at 2 a.m., it is bigger than life. This is the reality of living in a fallen world. In this life nothing is more certain than uncertainty, trials, tribulations, and suffering. It is was Augustine who said, "God had one Son on earth without sin, but never one without suffering."

That is what makes the first sentence of John 14 so difficult, "Let not your hearts be troubled." This is an imperative, a command. Seems impossible, huh? We live in a world filled with trouble, how can he expect our hearts not to be troubled with all the trouble?

Well, it is impossible if we do not include the rest of verse 1, "Believe in God; believe also in me." Our troubled heart is only alleviated when we place our trust in the triune God. It is simple. Faith, as the Westminster Confession reminds us, is "receiving and resting" upon God and his promise to us in Christ.

Here is a good exercise for today. Read John 14:2-3 and call your heart meditate upon these promises. In the midst of trouble, Jesus is pointing his disciples to the eternal, to the final fulfillment of all of God's promises. Let your troubled soul race to Revelation 21:3-4 and affirm not only what God has done, but what God will do. All of the trials we experience in this world will, in a moment, pass away forever and we will experience eternal peace and joy in the presence of God. This is what Jesus wants his disciples to remember and this is what Jesus wants you to remember... at 2 a.m.

MARCH 28

John 15-16



IHAVE FOUND THIS SECTION OF JOHN'S GOSPEL TO BE SO HELPFUL IN KNOWING HOW TO SHEPHERD CHRIST'S BRIDE.

Jesus gives such clear instruction regarding His desire and purpose for choosing a people for himself in 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide."

Jesus reminds us that genuine fruit-bearing can only happen when the branch has a life-sustaining relationship with the vine. He speaks of our walk with the Lord as a process of pruning. If we can remember that the trials and hardships of life are all part of helping us bear more fruit for God's glory, it will enable us to see the many evidences of God's sanctifying grace in our lives and ministry.

Jesus continues with his instruction to his disciples with the reminder of what our relationship with the world will look like. The follower of Christ will never win the approval and accolades of the world because the world has hated the Christ we love and represent. Understanding this will encourage us to remain faithful and keep us from falling away.

We must take to heart these words of our Lord in 16:33, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." Let me draw our attention to two more precious truths in caring for the flock of God. Jesus has sent a Helper, the Holy Spirit, to be a constant guide to our hearts for declaring truth to our folks and bringing glory to Christ! Lastly, we must avail ourselves to this promise in 16:24, "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

MARCH 29

John 17



BROTHERS AND SISTERS, COUNT IT A GIFT OF GOD THAT WE HAVE JOHN 17 RECORDED FOR US.

This text is like entering the holy of holies, it is a moment of grace for us to listen in as God the Son speaks to God the Father. Philip Melanchthon would say of John 17, “There is no voice which has ever been heard, either in heaven or in earth, more exalted, more holy, more fruitful, more sublime, than the prayer offered up by the Son to God himself.” This text has always been valued by the Church. John Knox, the great Scottish reformer, would often have this text read to him during his last days.

In this prayer Jesus will pray for himself (17:1-5), for his disciples (17:6-19) and for those would later believe through the ministry of his disciples (17:20-26). This prayer comes at a crucial time for Jesus. The “hour” that he had anticipated since 2:4 (7:30; 8:20) had arrived (12:23; 13:1, 31-32; 17:1) and now the Son pours his heart out in dependence upon his Father.

This is truly the Lord’s prayer as no other person could offer up this petition. Take time today to carefully read through John 17. Find yourself caught up in meditations upon your Savior’s words. Hear him plead, listen to his heart, see his passion and, in response, glory in your Christ. Don’t pass over these words quickly, they are too important. Texts like this deserve intentional meditations.

I can think of no better way to prepare for Good Friday than allowing this text to weigh heavily upon your mind and heart today!

MARCH 30

John 18-19 (Good Friday)



THE APOSTLE BEGINS TO CHRONICLE THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

It will begin with the betrayal, and it will end with a cross. Stuart Townend and Keith Getty capture it well in their song, “The Power of the Cross.”

*Oh, to see the dawn
Of the darkest day,
Christ on the road to Calvary.
Tried by sinful men,
Torn and beaten, then
Nailed to a cross of wood.*

There is no darker day in history. The perfect, pure, and spotless lamb of God will be judged by the unrighteous, the guilty, the vile. He will “bear the awesome weight of sin.” Awesome because the infinite wrath of God will be poured out upon the Son in judgement. But, the Son does not hang his head in shame and defeat, but in victory.

*Now the daylight flees
Now the ground beneath
Quakes as its Maker bows His head.
Curtain torn in two,
Dead are raised to life,
“Finished!” the victory cry.*

Good Friday is good because the cross does not end in defeat but in triumph. “It is finished” (19:30) reminds that Christ’s redemptive effort was final and complete. No more punishment is required. The sacrifice of Christ was perfect and brought forth the final and full redemption of sinners. We see the culmination of God’s promise of Genesis 3:15 as his Son crushed the head of Satan on this Easter weekend.

MARCH 31

John 19



AS CHRISTIANS WE NEED TO APPRECIATE THE DEPTH OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS.

The first three verses of John 19 give us a brief but helpful understanding of the sufferings Jesus would endure before he would be flogged, a crown of thorns would be twisted upon his head, and he would be clothed with a purple robe.

Flogging or scourging meant removing the clothes of the criminal or victim, tying him to a stake or pole, and repeatedly beating their back with either a pole or whip that would have lead or bone spikes attached. The flogging would cut through the skin, exposing the flesh and causing significant bleeding. Eusebius, the church historian, described a later Roman flogging by saying, "[The victim's] veins were laid bare, and the inner muscles and sinews, and even the bowels, were exposed." Yes, you read that correctly, the brutality left the potential of internal organs being exposed. The thorns placed upon his head were long and would dig into the skull of the victim, surely causing considerable pain and loss of blood. That which would characterize the curse (Genesis 3:17-18) would now adorn the brow of our Savior. The purple robe, saturated with blood, would be a means of mocking our beaten Savior as the soldiers cried out, "Hail, king of the Jews!"

Consider this question: Why was Jesus punished so severely? Many answers could be given to this question. The primary answer is not the hate or disdain of the Jewish leaders for Jesus. Instead, as Isaiah 53:10 reminds us, "it was the will of the Lord to crush him; to put him to grief." Jesus was punished and it was the will of God (Acts 4:26-28; 2 Corinthians 5:21). "Bearing shame and scoffing rude, In my place condemned he stood; Sealed my pardon with his blood. Hallelujah! What a Savior!" (Bliss, Philip, 1875)

APRIL 1

John 20 (Easter Sunday)



EASTER SUNDAY IS A GLORIOUS DAY FOR SO MANY REASONS. THIS DAY IS GOD'S DECLARATION TO THE WORLD THAT HIS SON HAS REDEEMED AND THAT HIS REDEMPTIVE EFFORTS ARE COMPLETE AND SUFFICIENT

The events of John 20 are crucial to our faith as Jesus' declaration of "It is finished" (19:30) is now vindicated as he is raised from the dead. The resurrection is just that, a divine declaration that Jesus is who he says he is and accomplished what he said he would accomplished. He indeed is the Son of God and he is the giver of eternal life.

Today, take time to read John 20 with 1 Corinthians 15 in mind. Paul will be clear (1 Corinthians 15:12-17). If this historical event did not take place then our faith is useless, we continue to bear the weight and judgment of our sins, our loved ones in Christ have perished, just like Jesus, and we are a pitiable people. John 20 is absolutely necessary or John 19 would simply be another human tragedy. Charles Spurgeon would say, "The resurrection of our divine Lord from the dead is the cornerstone of Christian doctrine. Perhaps I might more accurately call it the keystone of the arch of Christianity, for if that fact could be disproved, the whole fabric of the gospel would fall to the ground."

Today, on Easter Sunday, let your heart rest in the affirmation of God upon Jesus and his work. See in that empty tomb that your justification has been sealed, that your forgiveness has been secured and that eternal life is yours. The resurrection is more than a nice ending to a good story. It is the exclamation point on the end of this sentence, "It is finished!"

APRIL 2

John 21



JESUS WILL HAVE A UNIQUE AND NEEDED MOMENT WITH PETER.

Through a series of questions, Jesus will affirm Peter's love for him, and I believe, prepare him for the difficult days to follow. With each question Peter's anxiety grows (21:17). Each time Peter will respond with a clear declaration, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." We all know the story, right? Peter had repeatedly denied association with Christ on that fateful night. Now Jesus, before he ascends to the Father, will have a moment with Peter.

To each of Peter's responses Jesus says, "Feed my lambs." It is an if/then statement. If you love me, then feed my lambs. In other words, Jesus was preparing Peter for his departure and was calling him to demonstrate his continued love for Jesus through caring for the Savior's sheep. Would Peter learn from this moment? Read 1 Peter 5:1-4 and decide for yourself.

What about us? There are clearly implications here for the people of God. Text like this should compel us to likewise love the church, the flock of God. To love Jesus is to love his people. No one can truly love Christ if they do not love his bride. "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). How could we say we love Jesus and not love those whom he has redeemed with a sacrificial love?

Every week you sit beside those who are Christ's sheep. Do you love them? What is the evidence that you love them? Here is my challenge for you: Walk into your Sunday gathering, small groups, or Bible studies looking to love your Savior through loving his people. Jesus came to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45). What about you?

APRIL 3

Acts 1



THE BOOK OF ACTS SERVES AS A SORT OF PART TWO TO LUKE'S ACCOUNT OF ALL THAT JESUS BEGAN TO DO AND TEACH.

Like Luke's Gospel, Acts is addressed to Theophilus. Theophilus was, perhaps, a literary figure serving as the general addressee for an open-ended letter, but more likely, Theophilus was a flesh and blood person not so different from you and me. Luke intended to set forth a sort of apologetic – to give a true, compelling account of how God was gathering a people to himself and turning the world upside down. Luke is telling the story of what God did through God's people and why that matters for all of us.

This chapter contains a missionary mandate. Jesus tells his disciples that they'll be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the very ends of the earth. This also serves as a sort of thesis for the book, as the gospel is proclaimed and the Spirit of God moves in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, then in various points throughout the known world.

This story continues. This gospel is still preached. This God still saves.

As you read through Acts, think about the legacy in which you stand. Normal, everyday men and women, filled with the Spirit of God, served as the forerunners to the greatest movement the world has ever known. The people of God, empowered by the Spirit of God, carried the message of God everywhere they went. What a way to live! Thank God for his power and grace today. Thank God for the ones who shared the gospel with you. Pray for missionaries taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. Pray that God would give you boldness to take the gospel everywhere you go.

APRIL 4

Acts 2



GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT, COMES TO INDWELL THE HEARTS OF THOSE WHO RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL IN REPENTANCE AND FAITH.

Acts 2 features one of the most significant moments in salvific history: Pentecost. Filled with the Spirit, Peter (the same guy who had denied Jesus three times a little over a month ago) stands up and powerfully preaches the gospel. You killed him, and God raised him up!

That day his message, peppered with allusions to the Old Testament, cut his hearers to the heart and some 3,000 came to faith. Notably, observants of Pentecost annually celebrated the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai. At the base of Sinai, though, the people of God were disobedient. Some 3,000 people died. On this day, through the proclamation of the gospel, some 3,000 people did not die – 3,000 people found life – a life they would begin to work out in community.

They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. They met together in the temple, broke bread in one another's homes, and did all this with glad and joyful hearts. Together, they committed their community to God, and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Many of us rightly want to see people saved, but we forget about the simple power of obedience. The joy of the Lord in our midst is our greatest strength in a world opposed to the gospel. In our churches, we must commit to the simple things. To prayer, to fellowship, to the study of God's word. If God's presence dwells among us, it matters not how "cool" our worship services are. All those who visit will sense the palpable joy of loving community.

APRIL 5

Acts 3



FOLLOWERS OF JESUS FIX THEIR GAZE WHERE OTHERS AVERT THEIR GAZE.

In Acts 3 you'll find a story of Peter and John walking to the temple for prayer at three in the afternoon. They came across a man, lame from birth, who was carried each day to beg at the temple gate. Countless individuals had undoubtedly seen this man, and he had no doubt become accustomed to being ignored. Peter and John, like all people of God, respond differently. They looked, as the text says, "straight at him." "Look at us" (4:4), they said.

Where some see a destitute beggar, followers of Jesus see an image bearer of God, Almighty. Followers of Jesus recognize the inherent dignity in every human being. The outcast, the immigrant, the prostitute, and the unborn all matter because God has created them in his image.

The beggar no doubt expected them to give him some money or some food, but the Apostles had other plans. "I don't have silver or gold, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" Sure enough, he jumped to his feet and began to walk. About this passage, scholar F.F. Bruce re-tells a story that has worked its way through the annals of church history:

"According to Cornelius a Lapide, Thomas Aquinas once called on Pope Innocent II when the latter was counting out a large sum of money. 'You see, Thomas,' said the Pope, 'the church can no longer say, 'Silver and gold have I none.' 'True, holy father,' was the reply; 'neither can she now say, 'Rise and walk.'"

The lesson of Aquinas's barb rings especially true in the comfort of our American churches. We must identify with the vulnerable and trust the power of God.

APRIL 6

Acts 4



PETER'S NEWFOUND (SPIRIT-GIVEN) BOLDNESS SURFACES AGAIN IN CHAPTER 4 AS HE IS ARRESTED AND BROUGHT BEFORE THE RULERS OF THE DAY.

There, he pulls no punches when he preaches the truth of the gospel. "Whom you crucified; God raised from the dead." His sermon ends with a powerful statement that has thundered throughout history: There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved (4:12).

Luke goes on to note that the crowd was struck by their boldness. They realized that they were "uneducated and untrained men." They were amazed. They recognized that Peter and John had been with Jesus. I love that. They weren't left in awe of Peter's oration. They weren't impressed with his extensive knowledge of the Law. They recognized these men had been with Jesus.

How encouraging this narrative is for normal people like you and me. Sure, these guys would have had great knowledge of the Law, and Peter may have given a rousing speech. But the crowd noticed something different about the way they spoke. The crowd could not help but notice these guys weren't speaking about an impersonal truth. They were speaking of One they knew deeply. Candidly, I've preached sermons after weeks my devotional life was lacking. My study may have been fine, my notes clear, and my delivery strong. But something was missing. I didn't have the authority that comes with intimacy. When we talk about Jesus, we must remember we aren't speaking of a distant reality.

We're speaking of the only Name by which man can be saved. We're speaking of the One who saved us. We speak as those who commune with the Risen King.

APRIL 7

Acts 5



ONE CONSTANT IN ACTS IS CONFLICT. THE GOSPEL NEVER ENTERS A PLACE DEVOID OF IDOLS IT INTENDS TO SMASH.

Once again, the apostles are put in prison. This time an angel of the Lord busts them out, and they go straight to the temple to preach and teach. The authorities bring them back in to stand before the Sanhedrin. Again, the Apostles do not say what the rulers want to hear, and many are engulfed in rage. One Pharisee, though, by the name of Gamaliel, offered some sage counsel:

“So in the present case, I tell you, stay away from these men and leave them alone. For if this plan or this work is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even be found opposing God!” (5:38-39)

Man. Gamaliel likely had no idea how incredibly insightful and prophetic this statement turned out to be. By opposing these Apostles, the Sanhedrin was in fact fighting against God. And their plan and work continues today, some two thousand years later because it is absolutely not of human origin. I think about Good Friday and the absolute devastation of the disciples who had given their lives to follow who they hoped would be the Messiah. Then I think about the stunning revelation that the tomb in which Jesus was laid was found empty – that death could not hold this Jesus. Immediately, fear gave way to faith; defeat gave way to victory. All things sad would become untrue because Jesus is alive. These apostles weren’t escaping death and changing the world because they were awesome. These things were happening because Jesus is awesome.

Christ demands no more than our obedience. He surely will not fail.

APRIL 8

Acts 6



AS THE GREAT URBAN LYRICIST ONCE SAID, “MO’ MONEY, MO’ PROBLEMS.”

I think there’s a corollary truth in our churches. Mo’ people. Mo’ problems. We’ve seen the gospel message take hold in communities in Jerusalem and points outward, and much of the conflict we’ve seen thus far has been outside the community of faith. Generally, Jewish leaders just were not happy with the Apostles and the message they preached. But here in Chapter 6, we see conflict within the ranks of the Church.

The Hellenistic Jews felt that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food by the Hebraic Jews. Believe it or not, cultural conflict has existed within the Church from her earliest days. It would be the height of privilege for us to pretend that cultural conflict does not exist within our churches today. When that conflict arises, it’s important to remember the wisdom of Acts 6. The Apostles didn’t tell the Hellenistic Jews to sit down and be quiet. They didn’t tell them to focus on the gospel and forget about ethnic tension in their midst. They heard their complaints and mobilized trusted leaders to serve the church more effectively.

If your church is composed of one ethnicity, one political party, or one demographic, it is most likely not the gospel bringing you together – it’s one of the things I just mentioned. Because the gospel of Jesus Christ, takes old people and young people, black people and white people, Democrats and Republicans, and makes them a family by the blood of Jesus. When we hear complaints from members of other cultures, we must first listen with grace and humility then consider what action needs to be taken to find a remedy for the solution.

There may be rest in being right, but there’s joy in compassion.

APRIL 9

Acts 7



STEPHEN WAS ONE OF THE FOLKS WHO CAME IN TO SERVE AMID THE CONFLICT BETWEEN HELLENISTIC AND HEBRAIC JEWS.

Luke records that Stephen was performing great wonders and signs among the people when opposition arose. Stephen was seized, and like the Apostles before him, was drug before the Sanhedrin. Everyone in the Sanhedrin, looking intently at Stephen, saw his face shine like that of an angel. At the biggest, most trying moment of Stephen's life, the Lord of Glory was near.

Stephen stood before the Sanhedrin, filled and emboldened by the Spirit, and delivered an incredible overview of redemptive history, culminating in the work of the Righteous One whom his hearers have rejected. This time, no Gamaliel stood up to prevent violence, and Stephen was dragged out of the city, stoned, and killed. Stephen became the first Christian martyr.

Through it all, Stephen's focus was heavenward. He saw the glory of God. He saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. His face still shone like an angel. One could think that his life was being taken, but Stephen understood his life had already been taken by his Savior and Lord. With his dying breath, in the pattern of Christ, Stephen proclaimed, "Lord do not hold this sin against them!" Stephen's life bore witness to the truth that we become like that which we behold. By beholding Jesus, day in and day out, Stephen could withstand the test of a lifetime. By the power of the Spirit, Stephen had become like Christ.

Luke mentions that a young man was present and approved of this execution. I wonder if he heard Stephen's dying exclamation; I wonder if it moved him at all. Soon, this very young man would see the risen Lord, himself.

APRIL 10

Acts 8



JERUSALEM, AT THIS POINT, IS STILL A MAJOR HUB OF GOSPEL ACTIVITY.

It's the cradle of Judaism – it's a place where the groundwork had already been laid for a worldview that could make sense of a Messiah who would come for the salvation of the nations. Jerusalem was a good place to be for the sake of gospel missions.

In Chapter 8, though, an angel of the Lord speaks to Philip and commands him to head south on a desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza. Philip had just returned to Jerusalem from ministering to massive crowds in Samaria. But now the Lord, speaking through an angel, has a particular mission for Philip, and it involves heading out into the middle of nowhere. Perhaps you're ministering here in the great state of West Virginia and understand how it feels to be called out into the middle of nowhere! But Philip was obedient, and did as the Lord commanded.

As he traveled he found an Ethiopian eunuch (get this...) reading the prophet Isaiah! Talk about putting it on a tee... Philip, beginning with the Scripture he was reading, explained the good news of Jesus. The man believed and received baptism.

The gospel went to Africa, not because Philip was strategic, but because Philip was obedient. Perhaps his encounter on a desert road with a eunuch from Ethiopia bore more fruit for the gospel than his flashy encounter with Simon the sorcerer in Samaria. You may feel like you're wandering through the desert – that God would have more use for you in a place like New York City or Washington, D.C. Sure, maybe you'll end up in a place like that one day. But today, as you travel through the middle of nowhere, keep your eyes open. Be ready to share the good news of Jesus.

APRIL 11

Acts 9



CHAPTER 9 INCLUDES THE NARRATIVE OF SAUL'S FAMED DAMASCUS ROAD EXPERIENCE.

Breathing threats against the Church, Saul was on his way to Damascus to round up some followers of Jesus to bring back to Jerusalem for trial. Saul, who approved of Stephen's execution, was a bad, bad dude and everyone knew it. Jesus interrupts his journey; changing the course of Saul's life and the rest of human history.

Ananias is, in my opinion, the most underrated figure in Chapter 9. Imagine being that guy! God comes to you in a vision. (I could stop there and say... Imagine being that guy!) But God is getting his attention because he has a task for him that many would consider a bit undesirable. "Rise and go to the street called Straight... look for a man of Tarsus named Saul" (9:11). Imagine the look on his face. Saul?! You realize he wants to kill us all, right? That's where my mind would be. Ananias responded humbly, making sure he understood the charge correctly.

God responded: "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (9:15-16).

Ananias was obedient. He faced his fear. He believed that God had a purpose for even Saul.

Am I willing to face my fears to play my part in the mission of God? Perhaps it isn't a life and death type of thing. Maybe I'm afraid of people knowing me deeply or afraid that if I step out in faith I may fail. Am I willing to stick up for people the church is afraid of? Do I dare to believe that Jesus can use even the worst sinner I know?

APRIL 12

Acts 10



PETER AND A MAN NAMED CORNELIUS ARE BEING PREPARED FOR A GOSPEL ENCOUNTER.

“So Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him’” (10:34-35).

Peter, steeped in Hebraic Jewish culture, was about to be on the frontlines of a cataclysmic event. A very obviously Gentile family would enter the covenant community of God. From this point forward, the gospel would not be a primarily “Jewish” thing. Rather, much of Acts from this point forward will be devoted to the gospel being spread and churches being planted amongst people from Gentile cultures. Peter learned, vividly, that the gospel message is not tied to any specific place. Rather, God is seeking worshippers from every tribe and tongue on Earth.

This is such good news for people living on North America – a continent whose existence was completely unknown to the Apostles! The promise of the gospel, uttered first in the Garden of Eden when God promised that one would come from the woman who would crush the head of the Serpent, is not just for Jewish people. It’s for young boys in Sub-Saharan Africa. It’s good news for women in Bangalore, Berlin, and Boston.

Spend time today thanking God that he had the redemption of the whole world in mind from the very beginning. Like many Hebrews of Peter’s day, we can feel entitled. We can think that, because we’re from America, because we’re materially wealthy, because we have access to an unbelievable amount of resources, that we are God’s favorite people. God shows no favorites. May we repent of entitlement, and press in to fear him and live a life that is holy and acceptable.

APRIL 13

Acts 11



THE STONING OF STEPHEN CAUSED QUITE A STIR IN THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM.

“Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord” (11:19-21).

This text tells us that some of the folks from Cyprus and Cyrene who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks, proclaiming the good news of Jesus.

The church at Antioch would prove to be a missionary powerhouse. This congregation, led by the Spirit of God, laid hands on Paul and Barnabas and sent them out on their first missionary journey. This dynamite congregation had humble beginnings. The text says a couple things we should consider.

First, they began speaking to the Greeks and proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus. These disciples understood the truth of the gospel and were compelled to spread this message among new people. Who are we beginning to speak to? Every new convert begins with a new conversation.

Second, it says, the Lord’s hand was with them. Time after time, Luke demonstrates that the growth of the church is the result of God’s desire and God’s activity. These unnamed, everyday missionaries and their converts formed the core team for the congregation that sent out Christianity’s most noted missionary.

What can God do with your gospel conversations?

APRIL 14

Acts 12



SO PETER WAS KEPT IN PRISON, BUT EARNEST PRAYER FOR HIM WAS MADE TO GOD BY THE CHURCH" (12:5).

From this simple verse, we can learn much about the prayers of the Church. Their prayers were five things: unbound by circumstances, fervent, specific, Godward, and collective. Perhaps we can glean something about prayer by quickly considering each of these.

First, their prayers weren't bound by circumstances. James is now dead. Peter is in prison. These people have no political power and any means by which they could logically hope, in their own power, to keep things rolling. But they weren't trusting their own power. Their prayers weren't bound by circumstance.

Second, their prayers were fervent. The ESV says they were "earnest." Too often we simply go through the motions in our prayer life. Faced with unfavorable circumstances or the stagnation that comes with spiritual lethargy, our prayers are not as fervent as they should be.

Third their prayers were specific. They were praying "for him." They were praying for Peter. We aren't sure exactly how specific, but we could certainly presume they were praying for his release from prison for the sake of the Church. As a kid, I remember I used to pray for the whole world. The sentiment is noble enough, especially for a kid, but it isn't the most effective way to pray. God wants us to bring our requests and petitions specifically to him, that he may hear them and handle them as he wills.

Fourth, their prayers were to God. Sure, this seems like a given, but it needs to be noted. They are not wishing, hoping, or sending positive vibes. They are praying to the God of the universe.

Fifth, their prayers were collective. The whole church prayed together. There is great power when the people of God pray together.

APRIL 15

Acts 13



THROUGH THESE CHAPTERS, WE SEE THE APOSTLE PAUL'S MISSIONARY PATHWAYS, AND THERE WILL BE MANY OPPORTUNITIES FOR SELF-REFLECTION.

When we think about missions (whether that entails national or international church planting) we must consider whether our missionary pathways are informed by McDonald's or the Apostle Paul.

The first thing we can infer from Chapter 13 is that missions involves the whole Church, not just the vision of the pastors.

"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off" (13:2-3).

It seems that the Holy Spirit spoke to the whole church, calling Barnabas and Saul out for special missionary service. In a sense, every Christian is a missionary. The great British preacher Charles Spurgeon is said to have quipped that every Christian is either a missionary or an impostor. In a sense, this is absolutely true. In another sense, though, some Christians are called to special missionary service where they cross into new cultures with the explicit purpose of making disciples and planting churches. Perhaps this is you. Or, perhaps, you are a member of a church who is part of God's calling and confirming men and women for the missionary call.

In any case, remember you play a significant role in the Church, and the whole Church is involved in missions. Spend a few moments in prayer for the men and women serving on church planting teams in our state. Spend a few moments in prayer for your local church; that God would call out and equip men and women to leave home and share the gospel in new places.

APRIL 16

Acts 14



THE CHURCH IS BEING BUILT UP. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS ADVANCING. THE GOSPEL MOVEMENT IS GROWING.

Paul and his missionary team would share the gospel wherever a door was opened. There would be acceptance or rejection. They would spend some time with new believers equipping them to be disciples of Jesus and entrusting them to God. The missionary team would leave but later return to encourage the believers and help train their leaders. Paul would then trust the Holy Spirit to lead the churches as the team departs, but he would keep some sort of contact for the remainder of his ministry.

Paul's church planting pathway would have looked something like this:

Gospel Presented and Accepted → New Believers → New Churches Formed → Leaders Developed to Lead these Churches → Permanent Relationship between Paul and the Church

This church planting pathway is refreshingly simple. It doesn't cost a lot of money. It doesn't require a bunch of musicians or an amazing preacher. It requires a team of missionaries who commit to loving the people to whom they're sent over the long haul.

What would it look like if our church planting efforts looked more like this? Your church can do this. You can send a couple families to a new town to love their neighbors and share the gospel. Those who respond can be gathered into a small group. That small group can be taught what it means to be a church and can begin to adopt biblical leadership and regular observance of the sacraments. A new church can be formed!

APRIL 17

Acts 15 (Part 1)



HOW MUCH OF JUDAISM DOES A GENTILE HAVE TO ADOPT TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

They must value the Law in some degree, but to what degree must they obey it? In Chapter 10 when a Roman centurion of the Italian cohort came to faith, nothing is mentioned of dietary restrictions. Nothing is mentioned of becoming Jewish.

As different factions within the Church lobbied for the necessity of circumcision and other religious rites, the burgeoning faith's heavy hitters gathered in Jerusalem to consider how the church would lead on this issue. In the proceedings of the council, James would have to convince the Pharisees that circumcision is not required for new converts, and through the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the testimony of God, he does just that. Far from offending the culturally Jewish among them, the Jerusalem Council ruled that the Gentiles should be respectful of cultural differences and avoid sexual immorality and certain foods.

When the gospel and cultural preferences collide, the gospel won. The Jerusalem Council stands as a victory of truth and grace. The clarity of the gospel is upheld, the inclusivity of the gospel is upheld, and the nuance of cultural difference is understood.

The gospel must not die on the altar of our preferences. We must realize that every culture has its redeeming qualities and its blind-spots. We need each other. Remember, today, that we do not know it all. Perhaps all of us would want our churches to be more like us, conformed more to our image. But together we must submit first to the Scriptures, then to one another, learning and growing in an atmosphere of mutual respect and missional cooperation.

APRIL 18

Acts 15 (Part 2)



THE GOSPEL IS FAR TOO GREAT FOR ANY DEPARTURE FROM IT TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY.

When “some men” came preaching a false gospel of salvation by works, “Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them” (15:2). Not only Paul and Barnabas, but the other elders and apostles also joined in as well. After “much debate,” Peter argued, “we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (15:11). And thank God they did! Had this debate been lost, the gospel would never have made it to our state and not one of us would know Jesus.

Many in our day tend to grow bored with doctrine and think debate an unnecessary source of dissension while others love arguing doctrine and eagerly divide over non-essentials. What a thrilling and stark contrast Acts 15 portrays for us all!

The result of this council’s doctrinal debate was unity, “having come to one accord” (15:25), joy, “they rejoiced because of its encouragement” (15:31), and peace, “they were sent off in peace” (15:33). No one left licking their wounded egos; no one left disinterested and bored. What a biblical model and goal for our discussions and debates over theology with brothers and sisters!

May we love the gospel enough to contend for and guard healthy doctrine, and may we love one another enough to pray for and pursue unity, joy and peace as a result.

APRIL 19

Acts 16:1-5



WHAT DIFFICULT DECISIONS HAVE YOU MADE TO SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH YOUR NEIGHBORS?

Earlier in Acts 14:7, Paul came preaching the gospel in Timothy's hometown of Lystra and Timothy responded in faith. We know this because Paul later calls Timothy "my true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2).

Timothy counted the cost of following Jesus. When Timothy heard Paul preach the gospel, he saw Paul get stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead, and then limp back into town to keep preaching the gospel (Acts 14:19-21). Timothy had a front row seat to the risk of following Jesus. Timothy counted the cost of following Jesus. And Timothy still said "yes" to following Jesus.

Have you counted the cost of following Jesus? Jesus invites everyone to come and follow him, and he is going to a cross (Mark 8:34). This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. In our state, when we hear the word "disciple" many people think only of someone who attends church on Sundays and Bible study once a week. When Timothy heard "disciple," what did he think? Timothy thought of someone who risks everything to follow Jesus.

Timothy paid the price of discipleship. If it would help advance the gospel among the Jews, Timothy was willing to be circumcised (Acts 16:3). The mark of a follower of Jesus is this: they do not measure the potential inconvenience of the work ahead of them, they measure the potential impact of the work ahead of them. It is no wonder Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him.

What might God be calling you to cut out of your life in order to be more effective in evangelism in your town?

APRIL 20

Acts 16:6-40



ARE THERE ANY PEOPLE OR GROUPS YOU HAVE WRITTEN OFF IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

Of all the churches Paul planted, the church at Philippi stood out as a shining star of generosity and perseverance through suffering. Yet this faithful church was begun by God's work in a place and among a people we would never expect.

God works in the places we least expect. Paul had his plans made and his course set when he was interrupted by a vision from God calling him to preach the gospel in Macedonia. This was a place Paul had not planned to go. God works in the places we least expect.

West Virginia often makes the top of the list in depression, addiction, and obesity, and the bottom of the list in expectations. What if this became for us a vision of God working in the most unlikely places? Are there places in your community you have intentionally avoided or rarely considered that are ripe for God's work?

God works among the people we least expect. Paul shared the gospel with a wealthy religious business woman (16:11-15), cast a demon out of a slave girl (Acts 16:16-18), and rescued a suicidal jailer (Acts 16:25-34). From the humble beginning of this unlikely crew the church at Philippi was born. It is to these unexpected gospel partners of humble beginnings that Paul later promises this glorious future, "I am sure of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). God works among the people we least expect.

What if God is ready to begin a good work in the people you least expect? Why not pray for God to do just that?

APRIL 21

Acts 17



THE POWER AND EFFECT OF A SERMON DOES NOT LIE IN THE SKILL OR GIFTING OF THE PREACHER ALONE, BUT ALSO IN THE SKILL AND PRACTICE OF THOSE WHO LISTEN WELL.

Do you listen to the Word preached with eager receptivity and daily examination?

There is an examining of preaching that is so critical all eagerness in receiving the Word is lost. Without receptivity to the Word preached, our hearts will not be engaged. On the flipside, there's an eagerness that is so receptive to the Word taught that all the fruit of examining the Scriptures is lost. Without eagerly examining the Scriptures for ourselves, our growth will only come vicariously.

Eagerly receive the Word. If the sermon is from a specific text, study the passage every day for a week in advance in community. What if next Sunday when the Word is opened, you've already outlined the text, searched for the author's intent, and wrestled with its meaning and application in community? You can now listen eagerly to see what you have missed and to apply what you've seen.

This works for topical sermons as well. Leading up to the sermon what Scriptures can you find about the topic? What questions do you have about the topic? Daily studying and examining in a community of believers with an eager expectation will utterly change the effectiveness of the Word received on Sunday.

Examine the Scriptures daily to see. The best of preaching never replaces our hunger for the Scriptures but only stokes and supplements our eager awe for the Word of God and the God of the Word. The best of preaching gives us eyes to see what's already in the Word.

APRIL 22

Acts 18



WHEN PAUL OPENED HIS MOUTH IN CORINTH TO SPEAK ABOUT JESUS, HE WAS OPPOSED, REVEILED, AND READY TO LEAVE (18:5-6), BUT A WORD FROM GOD WITH TWO POWERFUL PROMISES STOPPED HIM IN HIS TRACKS.

“Do not be afraid ... for I am with you.”

If the living God actually dwells with us, how could fear ever be reasonable? Where might you go (or stay) if you were certain God was with you, God would not leave you, and God would never forsake you? This promise is not for Paul alone, but for every disciple Jesus has commissioned to make disciples (Matthew 28:28-20).

“... for I have many in this city who are my people”

For as long as the gospel is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16), this Word is true for you as much as it was true for Paul. This promise led Paul to stay for eighteen months longer than planned to keep talking about Jesus.

Many people are leaving our great state every year. The reasons to leave West Virginia make the press more often than the reasons to stay. But what difference might it make if we believed 1.) God is with us, and 2.) there are many people in this state who will call upon the name of the Lord if we are not afraid, but go on speaking about Jesus?

APRIL 23

Acts 19



SPRAWLING IN THE SHADOW OF THE PAGAN GODDESS DIANA'S TEMPLE, EPHEBUS WAS A MELTING POT OF RELIGION, PHILOSOPHY, AND SPIRITUALITY FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD.

The resulting culture of this city, steeped in spirituality, and relativism, presented its Christian inhabitants with challenges very similar to those faced in our culture today. Yet rather than fleeing from such a culture, Paul stayed longer in Ephesus than any other city, speaking boldly until all the residents of Asia heard the Word of the Lord (19:1-10).

Do you see the challenges of the neighborhood around you as reason to flee or cause to stay?

As Paul stayed and spoke boldly, the Word of the Lord increased and prevailed mightily, and the people of Ephesus began cleaning out their closets. They gathered up all of the idols they had previously worshipped and started a bonfire costing over \$8,000,000 (19:11-20).

If this happened in our state, how much would we burn? If this happened in your home, what would you burn?

As people turned to Jesus and away from their sin, certain businesses faced insolvency. (Acts 19:21-41). They pitched their financial dilemma to the town as spiritual intolerance, started a mob, and picked up twenty-five thousand confused rioters along the way.

Similarly, many in our state do not like Jesus because he directly conflicts with their agenda—their sin, their religion, or their bad business. Others are uninformed, but they resist Jesus because of misconceptions, bad experiences, false teachers, or because they don't want to go against the crowd.

If the Word of the Lord increased and prevailed mightily in this state how might it shift the religious landscape and economy of the area?

APRIL 24

Acts 20



PAUL REMAINED IN EPHESUS LONGER THAN IN ANY OTHER PLACE, PLANTING THE GOSPEL UNTIL THE ENTIRE SURROUNDING REGION HEARD THE GOSPEL.

“In every city... afflictions await me” (20:23)

Paul is leaving Ephesus and he knows he will not see his brothers again in this life (20:25). Paul is uncertain of all that awaits him ahead (20:22). What he is certain of is facing imprisonment and affliction and even death (20:23, 25). There is something greater to Paul than escaping imprisonment and affliction. There is something even greater to Paul than holding onto life itself.

“If only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus” (20:24)

What is greater than avoiding suffering or holding into life? Faithfulness to the Lord. Where lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life seek to satisfy our best life here and now, Paul has his eyes fixed on a greater good than life itself: faithfulness. How might our hearts come to see with Paul faithfulness to God as a greater pursuit than health, wealth, and the pursuit of happiness?

“To testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (20:24)

Faithfulness to God is known to be greater than life when the grace of God is known through the gospel. If Jesus’ perfect life and sacrificial death and glorious resurrection accomplished our righteousness, satisfied God’s wrath, and transferred us into the eternal kingdom of God, then faithfulness to God is one thing greater than our very lives. You can count on it.

APRIL 25

Acts 21



PAUL LEFT EPHESUS FOR JERUSALEM. A PROPHET BROUGHT HIM A WORD FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT, THAT HE WOULD BE BOUND AND DELIVERED INTO THE HANDS OF THE GENTILES (21:10).

When his brothers heard this, they pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem. He replied with these bold words, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (21:13).

After hearing his resolve, the believers replied with a prayer, “Let the will of the Lord be done” (21:14).

They learned this prayer from Jesus. First, when asked how to pray, Jesus taught his disciples to pray this way in the Lord’s prayer (Matthew 6:10). Second, in the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his death, Jesus himself prayed this prayer to his Father: “Your will be done” (Matthew 26:42b). And at the will of God, that darkest day of human history—the crucifixion of the Son of God—became the brightest dawn in human history—the salvation of the people of God.

Not all of us will face imprisonment or death for the name of the Lord Jesus, but every one of us faces the moment-by-moment decision of whether or not to live for the name of the Lord Jesus. We can live our lives anxiously avoiding risk, avoiding threats to our security, control, and comfort in ten thousand moments each day. Or we can live our lives for the name of the Lord Jesus by casting our lives upon the prayer he taught and modeled, “Let the will of the Lord be done!”

It is never foolish to entrust your future to the living God.

APRIL 26

Acts 22



PAUL'S STORY OF CONVERSION, THOUGH EXCEPTIONALLY EXTRAORDINARY, IS STILL A HELPFUL MODEL FOR ORDINARY CHRISTIANS TODAY WHO ARE SHARING THEIR CONVERSION STORY.

First, in every account of Paul's conversion, it is evident that Jesus is the hero of Paul's salvation. Christians recounting their story of conversion should follow Paul's example in making Jesus himself the hero of their conversion story and not their own works of righteousness.

Second, Paul shares his conversion story in a way that is contextual to his particular audience. When standing before King Agrippa, Paul emphasizes details of his conversion that would be more compelling to Gentiles. He emphasizes God sent him to open the eyes of Gentiles (26:17), and does not mention the "children of Israel." But in Acts 22 when standing before the tribunal with a predominately Jewish people as his audience, Paul emphasizes details of his conversion that would be most compelling to Jews. He includes that Ananias (a devout Jew) both attested to and participated in his conversion.

While every Christian experiences only one conversion, there are different aspects of their story that will prove more engaging and helpful to particular people with whom they are sharing the gospel. The aim is not to retell the exact same details in the exact same manner, but to know your audience, and share your conversion story in a way that would most serve the conversion or edification of your listeners.

Lastly, Paul's conversion story loudly proclaims there is no one beyond the bounds of God's grace. Any sin—however egregious or persistent—that is confessed and repented of can be forgiven, and anyone—however sinful or hardened—like Paul, can receive a new life, a new identity, and a new mission from Jesus.

APRIL 27

Acts 23



AS PAUL SAT IN A JAIL CELL ALONE—BEATEN, REJECTED, AND UNCERTAIN OF THE FUTURE ON ONE OF THE DARKEST NIGHTS OF HIS LIFE—THE LORD JESUS CAME AND STOOD BY HIM.

“Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome” (23:11).

Earlier, Paul had received visions of Jesus, but here Jesus physically came to prison and stood by Paul to tell him this one word, “Courage!” How must that one word from Jesus strengthened Paul’s soul? In all the New Testament only Jesus speaks this phrase:

- Courage! Jesus forgives sin (Matthew 9:2).
- Courage! Faith in Jesus brings eternal healing (Matthew 9:22).
- Courage! The presence of Jesus dispels fear (Matthew 14:27).
- Courage! Jesus is greater than the world (John 16:33).
- Courage! Jesus assures Paul the mission will be completed (2 Timothy 4:17).

Courage is Christ’s personal word for all who are trying to follow him, fraught with weakness, filled with sin, uncertain of the future, afraid of their circumstances, and anxious of impending failure. Stay at home mom, when your kids whom you love are overwhelming you—“Courage!” When you are wallowing in the guilt of sin you swore you would never commit—“Courage!”

With the courage of Christ, Paul did arrive in Rome as a prisoner. By means of his imprisonment, Paul ended up before kings, where he preached the gospel through his suffering and imprisonment.

There is no greater ground of courage than knowing that the worst of your circumstances can be turned by Jesus to advance the gospel. Every problem is a platform to share Jesus. Courage!

APRIL 28

Acts 24-26



THESE CHAPTERS TELL OF THE YEARS OF IMPRISONMENT AND TRIALS PAUL FACED, WHICH FINALLY CULMINATED IN AN AUDIENCE WITH KING AGRIPPA HIMSELF.

This meeting was a divine appointment for sharing the gospel. At Paul's conversion God promised, "he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Standing here before King Agrippa, by the providence of God, all of Paul's years of suffering had worked together to advance the purpose and promise of God to bring the name of Christ before kings.

However long a season of suffering you may endure, what God has promised God will accomplish. God works things out such that suffering is no obstacle to his purpose in his children, but suffering is made to serve the very purposes of God in fulfilling his promises to his children (Romans 8:28-29).

Thomas Watson writes of the joy that should fill our hearts in view of God's faithfulness to his promises to his people: *"To know that nothing hurts the godly, is a matter of comfort; but to be assured that all things which fall out shall co-operate for their good, that their crosses shall be turned into blessings, that showers of affliction water the withering root of their grace and make it flourish more; this may fill their hearts with joy till they run over."*

Are you facing a season of suffering? What joyful endurance may come from recognizing God is at work even in your suffering to accomplish his good purposes and fulfill his promises to and through his people.

APRIL 29

Acts 27-28:1-10



FOR ONE FINAL JOURNEY, PAUL THE PRISONER SET SAIL TO WITNESS BEFORE CAESAR.

During the voyage, a violent storm threatened to destroy all on board. An angel of the Lord promised Paul neither he nor anyone on board would lose their lives in the storm, for God had sent Paul to stand before Caesar. With this promise of protection ringing in his ears, Paul proceeded to warn the others, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved” (Acts 27:31). Paul’s warning did not undermine the promise of God, but such a warning served as one means of accomplishing the promise of God. The warnings kept the men from losing their lives.

This story is helpful as we consider the rest of Scripture where God has given both promises and warnings to his people—promises, to continue the work he has begun in them until its completion (Philippians 1:6), and warnings, that those who shrink back will be destroyed (Hebrews 10:39). The warnings of God’s Word do not undermine the promises of God, but the warnings are one means God uses to accomplish his promises. The warnings keep God’s children faithful to the end.

May we heed the warnings of God and hold fast to the promises of God in faith!

APRIL 30

Acts 28:11-31



FROM THE MOMENT HE MET JESUS (ACTS 9), PAUL WAS NEARLY ALWAYS ON THE MOVE.

In this closing passage, Paul's travels have finally come to an end. Since Acts 19:21 Paul set his face toward Rome, and now his mission was fulfilled as he arrived in the great city of Rome, the "ends of the earth." This was no mere fulfillment of Paul's mission, but of Jesus' commission (1:8, 9:15).

There at Rome, Paul welcomed all who came to him, and to all those whom he welcomed he proclaimed the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ just as he had faithfully done from the moment he first encountered the risen Jesus (9:20).

When we first met Paul he was a free man on a warpath to bind and chain the gospel. As Acts closes, Paul himself is in bonds, but the Word of the Lord is triumphing, unhindered and unfettered to the ends of the earth. Paul's story then ends not focused on Paul, but on the Word of the Lord Jesus Christ, the true hero and focus of both Paul and Acts.

As Jesus commissioned Paul, he has commissioned us to make disciples of this same Jesus by this same gospel (Matthew 28:18-20). By God's grace, may we as well fulfill the commission God has given us until the end, leaving no question Jesus has been the true hero of our lives.

MAY 1

Romans 1:7-12



PAUL SHARES THREE ASPECTS OF WHAT IT MEANS FOR US TO BE THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST IN A WORLD THAT IS HOSTILE TO OUR FAITH.

Paul points out that the faith we have in Jesus, although personal, is not private. Whatever is being reported about one of us affects all the others. In this case, Paul was giving thanksgiving and praise that the faith of the Christians at Rome was being seen positively. Their faith was being spoken of throughout the world.

How sad it is when that is not the case today. When a believer falls to the schemes of the evil one, the reputation of the entire Church of Jesus suffers from it. Paul said he was tirelessly remembering the Roman believers in his prayers. Perhaps the real reason that churches are stagnant, decaying, and in some cases, dying, is because of the sin of prayerlessness. Prayer meetings are the power plants of any church. When the prayer meeting is neglected, it is no wonder believers fall victim to the wiles of the enemy. As believers, we must remember our shared responsibility to pray for each other. Never forget that Satan is out there “like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour!” (1 Peter 5:8)

Finally, Paul expressed his fervent desire to meet personally with the believers in the church at Rome. For Paul, corporate worship was not an option. Our Savior is worthy of our worship. He tells us that whenever two or more are gathered together in his name, he is there, in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20).

Start today by taking inventory of your personal commitment to your brothers and sisters in Christ, in and through the local church!

MAY 2

Romans 1:18-21



INGRATITUDE IS AN AFFRONT TO THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

Perhaps the greatest problems in America today are not the crimes, murders, broken homes, drug abuse, pornography and gambling addictions that flood our news broadcasts. These things are not the real issue. They are merely symptoms of a deeper problem.

The source of so many of these problems is ingratitude. As Romans 1:18 says, it is readily observable that we are here as creations of God, in a world that was created for us by God. Therefore, the very least we can do is to recognize him as God and give him the thanks that is his rightful due.

It is the refusal to be thankful that leads us to discontent. Discontentment leads us to waste our time and resources seeking what we do not have, need, or even really want. Discontent is a never-ending pursuit of other things, in hopes they will fulfill us. It is discontentedness that eventually manifests itself in all of the negative behaviors listed above.

Want to change your life for the better? Develop the daily habits of thanksgiving and praise. When you do, there won't be much time or opportunity for discontentment!

MAY 3

Romans 2:28-29



AN UNCIRCUMCISED HEART MUST BE HUMBLLED BY ACCEPTING ONE'S OWN GUILT AND CHOOSING TO REPENT BEFORE GOD.

In Leviticus 26, God speaks to his people about the many blessings he will pour out upon them if they keep his commandments and “walk in his statutes” (26:3). God says it is not enough to have good intentions, unless they are carried out. It is our obedience that demonstrates our faithfulness.

In other words, what you do outwardly signifies what you believe inwardly. Nevertheless, those actions must arise out of a heart that is devoted to God’s Word. The results of disobedience are seen in Leviticus 26:14 and following.

Then, in verses 40-41, God explicitly says that those actions are the result of an uncircumcised heart. What God really desires of us is that our hearts be humble before him. It is repentance that allows for his forgiveness and cleansing. Then, when our hearts are right, Leviticus 26:42 says God will remember his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob on our behalf.

Thank you, Father, for circumcising my heart and adopting me into the covenant promises of Abraham!

MAY 4

Romans 3:19-20



HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU HEARD SOMEONE SAY, “WELL, I KNOW I’M NOT PERFECT, BUT I TRY TO BE A GOOD PERSON?”

Here is the real problem with that statement: By whose standards do you determine what it means to be a good person?

The standards of most people range from being kind to animals, to giving to good causes, to trying to be a good provider for the family. Taken on their own merits, those are all good things, but doing good things doesn’t really make you a “good person.”

If it did, then how many good things would you have to do? Isn’t that the essence of what most people believe it takes to make it to heaven? Isn’t it just about doing enough good things to outweigh all the bad things you’ve done?

The Bible says the standards for what it means to be good are not arbitrary. They are not ours to set. God has set the standard and that standard is outlined in the Ten Commandments!

Jesus said the greatest of those is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength.” I don’t know anyone who’s perfectly kept that one, do you?

That is why Jesus gave this response to the rich young ruler who called him, “good teacher”. It is recorded in Matthew 19:17: “Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is God.”

Thank God this day for Jesus, the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth!

MAY 5

Romans 4:1-3



IDON'T BELIEVE THAT! THAT'S JUST TOO EASY!" THAT IS OFTEN THE RESPONSE WHEN SHARING THE SIMPLE GOSPEL MESSAGE WITH AN UNBELIEVER. AND THEY ARE RIGHT ABOUT ONE THING - IT IS EASY!

God gave the people of Israel the Mosaic code of animal sacrifices and rituals that had to be carried out for sin to be atoned. But just like the Ten Commandments given earlier, Israel was proven incapable of fulfilling them.

The apostle Peter responded to the question of whether Gentiles had to become Jews and fulfill the law in order to be saved in Acts 15:10-11: "Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

Thank you, God, for giving us a way of salvation that is so simple a child can receive it and so amazing that a Ph.D. can never figure it out!

MAY 6

Romans 5:1-2



I WONDER HOW MUCH PEACE AND REJOICING
WOULD COST IF YOU COULD PURCHASE THEM IN
A STORE.

The Bible tells us that both of these are just the by-products of the grace we have, through our faith in Jesus.

That is incredible! Millions of people probably spend billions of dollars seeking just one of these commodities. They are disappointed, no doubt, when discovering that the coveted tickets, the new car, the house, or the luxury vacation they purchased has either faded out of consciousness, or lost the allure, just like everything else that is no longer shiny and new.

Faith in Jesus brings the grace of God and all the added bonuses, like the peace and joy we just mentioned. But that is just the beginning (as the announcer would say at this time): But wait! There's more! Later on, in Galatians 5, we see all kinds of other benefits the Bible refers to as the "fruit of the Spirit."

Thank you, Lord, for all the added benefits of your matchless grace!

MAY 7

Romans 5:3-5



WE GLORY IN TRIBULATIONS! WHO WOULD
EVER BELIEVE THAT?

Why would anyone glory in tribulations? The Apostle Paul writes that we can do so because of what arises out of those tribulations. Many people avoid tribulation and suffering at all costs. As Christians, I am not saying that we should seek or pursue them.

However, the Bible tells us that the trials and sufferings we endure as servants of Christ are not without merit. As I said, most people want to avoid tribulations at all cost, but that is because they are convinced they will lose something as a result.

Paul tells us that even the sufferings, trials, and tribulations we experience in life are not without profit to us in this life. He says that far from suffering loss as a result, they will actually benefit us by adding things that are priceless and enduring.

Perseverance, character, and an enduring hope are the results of patient endurance through trials and tribulations. James 1:2-4 tells us that we should even “count it all joy” when such things occur in our lives.

Father, please help me to see that through your grace, tribulation will add to, rather than take from, my life in Christ!

MAY 8

Romans 5:6-9



EVEN THOUGH WE WERE UNGODLY, CHRIST DIED FOR US. HOW WONDERFUL IS THAT?

Knowing full well that we were not worthy of his grace and not powerful enough to secure his grace, God demonstrated his love by sending Jesus to die for us anyway!

Many times people often say, “Well, I don’t want to respond to Jesus, because I know I am unworthy/unable _____ (you fill in the blank) to walk with Jesus after I am saved, and I don’t want to be considered a hypocrite.”

The Bible shows us the fallacy of that kind of thinking. In the gospel, we have a clear demonstration of God’s love for us. That means there is no reason we cannot come to Jesus and receive God’s grace.

The gospel is the demonstration of God’s love not a demonstration of our worthiness or ability.

Thank you, Father, for clearly showing me the gospel is all about you and your power and ability, not mine!

MAY 9

Romans 5:18-19



MANY PEOPLE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT JESUS' DEATH ON THE CROSS COULD SOMEHOW PAY THE PENALTY OF OUR SIN.

If that is the case, it means they must not accept the Genesis account of Adam's fall. Genesis 3:17 explains what Paul discusses again in Romans 8:20-21.

There, he says the whole creation was subjected to futility because of Adam's sin. The creation only produces thorns and thistles for us. Because one man tragically disobeyed God, now all of life is hard work!

But, praise God, there was another man who came as the redeemer. He has promised not only to redeem us from the wages of sin, but to redeem all of creation, as well!

Do you see the cosmic implications of all that? Jesus' death on the cross is powerful enough to do far more than just paying the price for our sin and rebellion against God. His death on the cross, and resurrection from the dead, is a foretaste and foreshadowing of how all of creation will be remade, renewed, and restored.

Wow! Thank you, Father, that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is far more powerful than I could ever ask, think, or imagine!

MAY 10

Romans 6:1-4



SOME VERSION OF THE PHRASE, “WE ARE BURIED IN THE LIKENESS OF HIS DEATH, TO WALK IN THE NEWNESS OF HIS LIFE” IS OFTEN QUOTED AT BAPTISMS. THAT IS A GREAT STATEMENT OF TRUTH.

Nevertheless, the greatness of the truth is lost if we leave it just as a statement. It should be much more than a statement. That truth should be lived as a lifestyle. Baptism is not the end of the Christian testimony. It is the beginning of a grand and brand new way of life.

We are sons and daughters of the redeemed! We are more than conquerors! We are his own chosen people! Our lives should reflect that the resurrection of Jesus was a foretaste of what we ourselves will experience when he returns for us.

There is no more time to waste in the foolish desires of the flesh. We have a resurrection to reflect!

Lord, help my life become a reflection of the wonderful reality of the resurrection of my Savior and Lord.

MAY 11

Romans 6:20-23



WHEN WE WERE SLAVES OF SIN, WE PRESENTED OUR BODIES AS SLAVES OF UNCLEANNESS AND LAWLESSNESS, WHICH LED TO MORE LAWLESSNESS.

Romans 6:20-23 tells us the opposite of that is also true. Now we are living lives of holiness in Christ and moving to more and more holiness because we are coming ever nearer to the Savior. Praise God!

This is what many people do not understand. The Christian life is never lived by coasting. There is no such thing as remaining in spiritual neutral. Even when you think you are just spinning your wheels, you are actually in drive.

Your thoughts, intentions, and actions are taking you somewhere. All that you are thinking, planning and doing is either leading you nearer to the Lord or taking you further from him.

Those who believe they are just coasting through life without Christ do not realize that whenever you are traveling on coast, it means you are going downhill.

Thank you, Father, for making my life a purposeful pursuit in Christ.

MAY 12

Romans 7:18-20



IN MY YEARS UPON THIS EARTH, I HAVE DISCOVERED THAT I HAVE ONLY ONE, TRUE, CONSISTENT ABILITY. I AM A PROFESSIONAL AT MESSING THINGS UP!

It isn't that I want to mess things up; I truly desire to make things better for my family and friends and those around me.

The trouble is, try my best, I can't seem to do things the way I want them to turn out. Even with the very best intentions, my physical limitations and knowledge come so far short of what I attempt.

Praise God, he isn't limited by my puny abilities and ineptitudes! That is why my best plan of attack, in any endeavor, is to get my own fingers out of the pie (so to speak) and pray to the one who does all things well.

Jesus said it best in John 6:63, **"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing."**

Thank you, Holy Father, that I can place my confidence in you, where it belongs!

MAY 13

Romans 8:1-2



NO CONDEMNATION IN CHRIST? I AM DECLARED NOT GUILTY?

What an amazing thing that God doesn't hold our sins against us (see 2 Corinthians 5:19)!

This is the freedom spoken of in Galatians, as well. We are not walking in fear of falling back into the grasp of the evil one, because we are walking according to the Spirit of the law of life, in Christ Jesus.

Knowing Jesus means you have a personal relationship with the judge of all things. Furthermore, he is also your defense attorney and the one sitting in the jury box.

There is no reason to fear death and judgement any further. Christ, our advocate with the Father, has already determined the verdict and outcome of our lives. And the sentence is...everlasting life with the Father.

Thank you, God, that my only "life sentence" is eternal life with you, in Jesus' name!

MAY 14

Romans 8:18-19



AREN'T CATERPILLARS KIND OF CREEPY (PUN INTENDED)?

They are completely bound by their surroundings. Whether they are attached to the sides of a tree or earthbound, their bodies are always attached to something. They crawl around, seemingly unaware of exactly where they are going.

And they always seem to be eating. They are constantly absorbed in the process of either consuming something or seeking something else upon which to chow down, poor things.

There just isn't much else to the life of a caterpillar. But after completing the cycle of life, and climbing from their cocoons, they emerge as almost entirely different creatures! No longer earth or even tree-bound, they are free to the limitless sphere of the skies!

The Apostle Paul tells us it will be much like that for those of us who are in Christ. After our transformation, through physical death, we will emerge in the full likeness of our Savior!

The Bible says all of creation eagerly waits for the great reveal that is yet to come. That is why the sufferings of this present time aren't worthy of such time and attention as we often give them.

Father, I cannot wait for the transformation from the corruption of this mortal flesh and the grand appearance you have that awaits us!

MAY 15

Romans 8:31-34



WHY DO WE GET SO UPSET OVER COMMENTS THAT MAY APPEAR TO DISPARAGE OR DISCOURAGE US?

Why have Facebook, Twitter, and the other social media outlets often turned into nothing but back and forth attacks?

The best approach is to refuse to become involved in such twaddle. Why do we let such things bother us?

Perhaps it is because we often forget what is going on in the throne-room of heaven. There is a lot of commentary going on about us there, as well, but the Bible tells us that Jesus is the one doing the speaking. He is interceding for us!

But unlike the often less than stellar commentary that is going on down here, the Bible says that Jesus is constantly speaking on our behalf. He is talking about us to the Father, but the report he is giving is completely positive. He is for us; never against us!

Thank you, Father, that my advocate before you is Jesus. He is the one who died for me, and now lives eternally for me!

MAY 16

Romans 9:1-18



WHO ARE THE “CHILDREN OF PROMISE” PAUL IS WRITING ABOUT? THEY ARE THE PEOPLE WHO TRUST IN JESUS CHRIST FOR THEIR SALVATION.

The basis for this salvation is founded on God’s electing grace through faith in him alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). In our text for today, God’s choice of Jacob over Esau powerfully illustrates the point that salvation has nothing to do with any merit found in man. God emphasizes this point by making his choice of Jacob over Esau prior to their birth, even before they had done anything good or bad (9:11-13).

This is the good news of the gospel! Salvation depends “not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy” (9:16). If God’s choice were based upon merit, who could be saved? “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23) and “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). But praise be to God who chooses to save sinners in spite of their sin (Romans 5:8).

Paul shares his heart and passion for the salvation of the lost who were “his kinsmen according to the flesh” (9:3). May we have this heart and passion to share the good news with our lost kinsmen who live, work, and raise their families in our own communities here in West Virginia. Like Pharaoh, God has also raised us up for this very purpose, “that [his] name might be proclaimed in all the earth” (9:17).

MAY 17

Romans 9:19-33



IN OUR PASSAGE TODAY, PAUL COMPARES THE JEWS OF HIS DAY, WHO REJECTED JESUS AS THEIR MESSIAH (9:32-33), WITH THE GENTILES WHO CAME TO RECEIVE HIM BY FAITH AS THEIR SAVIOR.

In this distinction, he reveals how both Jews and Gentiles attain the righteousness of God, and thereby become His people. The Gentiles did not pursue this righteousness, but they came to attain it by faith in Jesus Christ (9:30). Israel pursued a law of righteousness, but they did not arrive at that law. Why? “Because they did not pursue it by faith (in Jesus), but as if it were based on works” (9:31-32).

So Israel, known historically as God’s people, believed they could become righteous before God by their own works. And Gentiles, known historically as not being God’s people, had no desire to pursue righteousness. This is the good news of the gospel: the Lord redeems a people for himself out of both Jews and Gentiles. In both cases, the righteousness necessary to be reconciled with God comes only through faith in Jesus Christ who is our righteousness (Romans 3:21-25).

God promised, through his prophet Hosea, that he would redeem people from among the Gentile nations (9:24-26). Additionally, God promised that even though a majority of Jews would reject Jesus as their Messiah, he would redeem a remnant from among them (9:27-29).

May we praise the God who has counted us righteous in Christ from among the nations and may we proclaim the gospel of God’s righteousness in Christ to the nations.

MAY 18

Romans 10:1-13



THROUGHOUT PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES, WE SEE HIS COMMITMENT TO PRAYER.

And at the beginning of today's passage, Paul expresses his heart's desire and prayer to God for his Jewish brothers to be saved. They continue to pursue, with zeal, a righteousness that is based on the Law. But God's indictment against his people Israel was their failure to keep his Law. Moses wrote in the Scriptures "that the person who does the commandments shall live by them" (10:5). However, sinners are not capable of keeping the Law of God in perfect obedience. Unfortunately, in their zeal to pursue a righteousness according to the Law, they were "ignorant of the righteousness of God" (10:3) revealed in His Word.

Jesus said to the unbelieving Jews, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:39). The salvation of God's people would not come through a righteousness based on their own works, but through "the righteousness based on faith" (10:6) in Jesus Christ.

This is good news, not only for the Jews, but for people from every tribe, language, and nation throughout the world (10:12). "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (10:13). Pray to God for the lost, that they may be saved. Proclaim to them the word of faith; that "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (10:9).

MAY 19

Romans 10:14-21



HAVING MADE THE CASE THAT BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES ARE SAVED BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, PAUL AFFIRMS THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH.

This saving faith “comes from hearing, and hearing from the word of Christ.” Four important questions are asked: 1) How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? 2) How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? 3) How are they to hear without someone preaching? 4) How are they to preach unless they are sent?

The answer: God is sending preachers. “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news” (10:15). The Greek word that translates into “preach” means to proclaim the good news or to evangelize. God has chosen to send his servants to proclaim the good news of the gospel throughout the whole world as a testimony to the nations (Matthew 24:14).

Who are these servants? From the founding of the church, God sent his apostles and prophets. The good news of the gospel was proclaimed in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and has continued to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). In addition to these messengers, God gave the church evangelists and shepherds and teachers “to equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Ephesians 4:12).

Therefore, the responsibility to proclaim the good news throughout the world belongs to every member of the church. May we as members of Christ’s body, pray and partner together at the local, associational, state, and national levels to reach the world with the good news of Jesus Christ.

MAY 20

Romans 11:1-10



AT THE CONCLUSION OF ROMANS CHAPTER 10, PAUL REVEALED HOW MANY OF HIS JEWISH BRETHREN HAD HEARD THE WORD OF GOD, BUT REFUSED TO BELIEVE IN JESUS FOR SALVATION.

So according to God's promises through his prophets, the gospel was going to the Gentiles. Paul then begins to address the question "has God rejected his people [Israel]" (11:1)?

The answer to this question reveals a great deal about God's sovereignty in the salvation of his people. God has not rejected his people from among the Jews. First, Paul shares how God saved him. "For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin" (11:1). Many of Paul's fellow Jews pursued a righteousness under the law. But Paul placed his faith in Christ, counting everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord (Philippians 3:8).

Second, Paul shares how God saved a remnant in the day of Elijah. Elijah thought everyone in Israel had rejected God to follow Baal. But God responded, "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal" (11:4). Finally, Paul shares God's promise that, "the elect would obtain salvation, but the rest were hardened" (11:7).

Even as God responded to Israel's disobedience and rejection with his righteous judgement, we see his grace and mercy in the salvation of this chosen remnant. This is our story. We deserve his judgment because of our sin, but praise be to God "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!" (1 Timothy 1:15)!

MAY 21

Romans 11:11-24



GOD WORKS IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS. AS WE COME TO THE PASSAGE FOR TODAY, WE ARE INTRODUCED TO GOD'S GREAT AND MYSTERIOUS PROVIDENCE.

The rejection of Jesus Christ by the majority of his people Israel, became the means by which people from every Gentile nation are brought into the kingdom of God. This redemption of the Gentiles would serve God's greater purpose in making Israel jealous, causing many of them in the future to turn to Christ and place their faith in him (11:11-12).

This is God's purpose revealed in his Word. "They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are no people" (Deuteronomy 32:21). Although God's judgements are unsearchable and his ways are inscrutable, we can be greatly encouraged by two clear promises in this passage.

First, God is currently saving his people from among the Gentile nations. We can rejoice in the Lord that he has not only brought people from North America into his kingdom, but by his mercy, he has brought and continues to bring many from our state, here in West Virginia. Second, although we see a remnant of God's people Israel coming to faith in Christ today, the Lord has decreed in his Word the future salvation of many from among the Jews.

May we contend earnestly for the advance of the gospel, knowing the certainty of God's purpose to bring Jews and Gentiles into his kingdom!

MAY 22

Romans 11:25-36



A MYSTERY IS SOMETHING THAT HAS BEEN HIDDEN IN THE PAST AND IS NOW REVEALED IN THE SCRIPTURE.

Paul begins this passage with the purpose of addressing a mystery. And what is this mystery being revealed now in Scripture? “A partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (11:25). Paul reveals the truth about God’s hardening of Israel and that this becomes the means of Gentiles being brought into the kingdom; ultimately leading to the future salvation of the Jews. Then he quotes from Isaiah 59:20-21, revealing the truths written in God’s word all along.

What can we learn from this mystery being revealed? First, we can trust fully in the certainty of God’s Word. God will bring about everything that he has written in his Word. He declares that “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 49:9-10).

Second, we can trust fully in the promises of God. Paul affirms that “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (11:29). This means that God will never change his mind with regard to his promise.

Finally, these deep truths result in Paul worshiping God. He writes, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways” (11:33)! May we worship him today; “To him be glory forever. Amen” (11:36)

MAY 23

Romans 12:1-8



PRIOR TO OUR NEW LIFE IN CHRIST, WE LIVED AS THOSE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD.

Paul paints a vivid picture of what that fallen life looks like in Romans 1-3. For example, “although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Romans 1:21).

If futility of our thinking characterizes the life of the unbeliever, then being transformed by the renewal of our minds by God’s Word characterizes the believer. The transformation of our minds happens decisively at conversion, as we respond to the Word of God by the enabling of his Spirit. We find the very first believers in Jerusalem “devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42).

God continues the spiritual renewal of the hearts and minds of his people through his transforming Word. This enables every believer to discern the will of God. Paul writes, “Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory” (1 Corinthians 2:6-7).

As we continue the work of making disciples in West Virginia, let us be devoted to the faithful teaching of Scripture, the discipline of daily meditation on Scripture, and the dedication of our lives to God’s will and service.

MAY 24

Romans 12:9-21



PAUL BEGINS THIS PASSAGE BY CALLING BELIEVERS TO GENUINE LOVE.

“Let love be genuine” (12:9). The word genuine literally means to be without hypocrisy. As believers love genuinely, we “abhor what is evil [and] hold fast to what is good” (12:9). Then Paul provides instructions concerning two kinds of people we should love: other believers and our enemies. By this love, we are exemplifying and serving the Lord (12:11).

First, we are to “Love one another with brotherly affection” (12:10). To this end we need to “outdo one another in showing honor” (12:10), rejoice, be patient, and pray for one another (12:12). Additionally, we need to “contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality” (12:13).

Second, we are to love our enemies. “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them” (12:14); “Repay no one evil for evil” (12:17); “never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God” (12:19); “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink” (12:20).

Jesus calls his disciples to love one another as he has loved them (John 13:34). The love of Christ enables us to “live in harmony with one another” (12:16). But Paul knows firsthand that our Christ-like love may be rejected by the enemies of the cross or even other believers at times. Therefore, he encourages every believer, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (12:18). Exemplify the love of Christ. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (12:21).

MAY 25

Romans 13:1-7



HAVING CALLED UPON BELIEVERS TO EXEMPLIFY THE LOVE OF CHRIST, BY LOVING OUR FELLOW BELIEVERS AND LOVING EVEN OUR ENEMIES, PAUL NOW ADDRESSES HOW WE SHOULD RELATE TO GOVERNING AUTHORITIES IN THE WORLD.

God calls every person to “be subject to the governing authorities” (13:1). First, Paul calls us to obey governing authorities, because they have been instituted by him and they exist solely because of him (13:1). The Scriptures testify to how the Lord raises up leaders and brings them down. Therefore, believers are to be subject to authority.

Second, we are called to obey governing authorities because they are God’s servants intended to do us good (13:4). Although history is filled with corrupt kings and kingdoms - even in Paul’s day - God has established such authorities to protect and preserve the citizenry. To this end, believers are instructed to pay taxes “to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed” (13:7).

In the letter to Timothy, Paul instructs the church to pray for all people, including our leaders: “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions”. The intended outcome of this prayer is that we may lead “a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

Pray for the civil authorities of our communities, our state, and our nation, and may we honor God in honoring them.

MAY 26

Romans 13:8-14



AS THOSE WHO BELONG TO CHRIST, WE LIVE IN THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY.

Our new life in Christ is evidenced by casting off the works of darkness (v. 12b). The works of darkness characterize how we once lived apart from Christ. Prior to salvation, “you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:1-2).

Believers have experienced new life in Christ and therefore we are “a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Paul affirms that by means of regeneration, we have been “made alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5). As those who have been sanctified, he calls believers to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (13:14).

Paul encourages us to walk faithfully in holiness with this goal in mind: “salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed” (13:11). This aspect of our salvation speaks to our glorification, the time when we will enter into the presence of the Lord. There, believers will dwell with him forever and “he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

So let us walk properly, as in the daytime, (13:13) and fulfill his commandments through love (13:8-10).

MAY 27

Romans 14:1-23



IN OUR TEXT FOR TODAY, THE BELIEVERS IN ROME COULD NOT AGREE ON WHICH DAYS WERE TO BE OBSERVED AS HOLY DAYS OR WHAT FOODS WERE PROPER TO EAT.

Paul begins: “As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions” (14:1).

In addressing this matter, Paul first directs our attention to Christ’s lordship; “For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living” (14:9). Paul orients our thinking to the truth that we are all ultimately subject to judgment of the Lord. “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (14:1). Therefore, “each of us will give an account of himself to God” (14:12).

Second, we must act by both conviction and faithfulness to the Lordship of Christ. Paul clarifies, “The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God” (14:6).

Finally, we must be intentional to pursue God’s glory in every aspect of our lives. “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). To this end, may we be mindful not to cause our brother to stumble in the faith, but “let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (14:19).

MAY 28

Romans 15:1-13



SOME BELIEVERS IN THE CHURCH IN ROME WERE FACING DISAGREEMENTS THAT WERE THE RESULT OF AN IMMATURE FAITH.

Therefore, those who are more mature in their faith are encouraged to come alongside those who are weaker in their faith. “We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (15:1). In these cases, those who are more mature in their faith intentionally strive to “please his neighbor for his good, to build him up” (15:2). Building others up in the faith is the goal of Christian discipleship.

First, Paul directs our attention to Christ: “For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me’” (15:3). He quotes Psalm 69:9 to present Christ as the benchmark of our discipleship.

Second, Paul states how essential the Scriptures are to discipleship: “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (15:4).

Third, Paul illustrates the importance of prayer by offering a prayer: “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (15:5-6).

The goal of helping others become like Jesus, by the means of the Scriptures and prayer, is to glorify God. “Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (15: 7).

MAY 29

Romans 15:14-33



IN OUR PASSAGE FOR TODAY, PAUL PROVIDES A SUMMARY OF WHAT CHRIST HAS ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH HIM TO REACH THE GENTILES (15:18), SO THAT “FROM JERUSALEM AND ALL THE WAY AROUND TO ILLYRICUM I HAVE FULFILLED THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST” (15:19).

In writing these things, Paul desires to strengthen their mutual commitment and partnership for the gospel.

First, Paul lived to share the gospel: “I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named” (15:20). His ambition is driven by his love for Christ and the fulfillment of God’s Word through Isaiah: “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand” (15:21).

Second, Paul longed for fellowship with other believers. Having fulfilled his ministry, Paul shares how he has “longed for many years to come to [them]” (15:23). It is his hope and desire “that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company” (15: 32).

Finally, Paul knew the importance of prayer. He faced great opposition from the unbelievers as he returned to Jerusalem, and he was hoping to be delivered from them and sent to Spain. So he appeals to the Roman church to “strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf” (15: 30).

May we strive together in our faith to share the gospel of Christ, encourage one another in fellowship, and pray for one another as we fulfill our ministry.

MAY 30

Romans 16:1-23



PAUL MAKES NO DIRECT MENTION OF SATAN IN ROMANS (OTHER THAN AN INDIRECT REFERRAL TO ANGELS AND RULERS IN 8:38) UNTIL HERE IN CHAPTER 16.

What he writes serves to edify the body of Christ, which faces great trial and tribulation from the evil one: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (16:20). Jesus Christ continues to build his church “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). We see the evidence of Christ’s advancing church here in our text.

First, evidence is found in the many names of believers and church fellowships which are documented here. Everyone from Phoebe, to Priscilla and Aquila, down to Timothy, Gaius, Erastus, and Quartus, with each local church fellowship revealing a growing church.

Second, there is evidence of ongoing discipleship and doctrinal fidelity in the church at Rome. Paul writes, “For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil” (16:19).

Finally, there is evidence of great spiritual warfare. Satan assaults the church with false teachers and divisions. The Church prevails through sound doctrine, and Satan will be crushed. Through his great hymn, Martin Luther reminds believers, “The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure.”

May “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (16:20).

MAY 31

Romans 16:25-27



HAVING CONCLUDED THIS DOCTRINALLY RICH AND VERY PRACTICAL TEACHING IN ROMANS CONCERNING THE GOSPEL, PAUL BREAKS FORTH IN GLORIOUS PRAISE TO GOD!

Paul praises the one who is able “to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ” (16:25).

Paul praises the one who brought forth the gospel “according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed” (16:25-26).

Paul praises the one who through the prophetic writings “has been made known to all nations” (16: 26).

Paul praises the one who’s great and sovereign purpose, “according to the command of the eternal God, [was] to bring about the obedience of faith” (16:26).

God is infinitely wise, and he is the only God: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:5-6). In his vision before God’s throne, John saw the Lamb standing, “as though it had been slain” (Revelation 5:6) and he declared “Worthy are you... for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9).

God has predetermined, before the foundation of the world, to not only bring his people to saving faith in Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the gospel, but also to continually strengthen his people in their faith through the ongoing teaching and application of the gospel in their lives. May we praise him.

“To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen” (16:27)

JUNE 1

1 Corinthians 1:1-9



IF ANY NEW TESTAMENT LETTER COULD BRING US HOPE ABOUT THE CONDITION OF OUR CHURCH, IT IS 1 CORINTHIANS.

This was a rough group of individuals brought together by God. We see, early in the first chapter, that it was God who brought this collective bunch together. Paul writes in verse 2, “To those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.”

Notice how this church is identified. They are identified as “saints.” Even though this church had many areas that needed work, God still referred to them as saints. If you are in Christ then this is how God looks at you, too. Being a saint is not a special class of Christian that God is waiting to promote you to. If Christ has sanctified you then he looks at you in the same light as he does St. Peter, St. Thomas, or any other saint in church history.

Notice, also, the recipients in verse 2, “To those sanctified in Christ Jesus.” The word “sanctified” is written in past tense, meaning it has already been accomplished. This should be incredible news for us! Though none of us are perfect, we trust that if Christ is in us then he will finish the good work that he first started (Philippians 1:6). We see the same truth in 1 Corinthians 1:8. Verse 8 informs us of God’s power to keep us. It is God who will, “sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And all of this is possible because of the truth found in verse nine, “God is faithful.”

God cannot lie. He cannot break a promise. Please spend some time meditating on the truth that God is not finished with you yet. Just like the church at Corinth, he is not finished with you yet. Thank him today for his promises are sure.

JUNE 2

1 Corinthians 1:10-17



SADLY, THE CHURCH AT CORINTH IS NOT THE FIRST CHURCH YOU HAVE PROBABLY SEEN FACING DIVISION.

Divisions in the church are far too common. Some divisions can be so divisive that it ultimately leads to splitting the church into two distinct congregations. There are such factions in this church, that Paul identifies one group as, “Chloe’s people.” When the unity of the church is becoming shaky, do you gather “your people” so that your side will win the vote?

Paul says that within this divided body there has been quarreling. James gives great insight to why we quarrel. James 4:1-2 says, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?” This is a great question! What do you think is the answer from James? Often times we think if people in the church would just listen to us and do what we think then the church would be a better place. Look at the answer James gives us, “Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.”

Is it possible that divisions are happening in your church because of you? Maybe divisions are not happening because of you, but what are you doing to bring about unity? Is there a relationship in your church or life that has been divided or damaged? Today would be a great day to start pursuing unity. Please take some time and pray for the churches in our convention and in our communities to be united in Christ.

JUNE 3

1 Corinthians 1:18-31



CAN YOU REMEMBER BACK TO YOUR YEARS OF GYM CLASS? DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN EVERYONE WOULD LINE UP AGAINST THE WALL AND TWO CAPTAINS WOULD BE SELECTED FROM YOUR CLASS?

The two captains played the role of sovereign lord over the value and worth of each classmate. Being a part of the team was solely based on how athletic or popular you were. If you weren't either of those then you probably hated the selection process. Most captains would try to build the ultimate team in order to help their chances of being victorious. Ultimately there was always one person who was never chosen by the captain's desire, but forced on the team simply because they were the last person available.

In 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, we see this incredible picture of God's might. He allows us to see a glimpse of his plan. It was the same blueprint he had been using throughout history in order to be victorious. His plan, however, was the antithesis of many of our gym class experiences. Paul writes in verses 27-29, "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."

God does not need us on the team in order to be victorious. He has chosen us to be a part of the team so that when we see victories, we will not boast at what we have done, but rather point to what he has done. Spend the day making much of him!

JUNE 4

1 Corinthians 2:1-16



SOMETIMES WE CAN TEND TO THINK THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS RESTING ON OUR SHOULDERS; THAT IF WE DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT WORDS TO SAY THEN IT IS GOING TO BE OUR FAULT THAT OTHERS DON'T COME TO KNOW CHRIST AS LORD AND SAVIOR.

But verses 1-5 are very freeing from this type of thinking. The apostle Paul admits that he did not come to this church with lofty speech or wisdom. He was not resting in his power to persuade the people at Corinth. Paul said, "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (2:4). Then he gives the reason to why this is freeing to us, as we share our faith with others. He says, "That your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (2:5). How freeing is this gospel truth!

He goes on to say that the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God. This is also freeing. We cannot take it personally when our neighbors, coworkers, or family members mock us for our faith. It is folly to them. They are not rejecting you, but they are not able to understand. Instead, we must continue to love them, faithfully proclaim God's message, and pray the Lord will open their hearts to the truth of the gospel.

Let us walk around today with confidence that God is opening up the eyes of the natural man. We have no idea whose hearts he is changing. We must boldly proclaim the truth without fear of man! Who can you share your faith with today?

JUNE 5

1 Corinthians 3:1-15



AT SOME POINT IN YOUR LIFE YOU HAVE PROBABLY HEARD THE PHRASE, “WHY DON’T YOU JUST GROW UP?” THAT IS WHAT PAUL IS DEALING WITH AT CORINTH - A CHURCH FULL OF NEW CONVERTS THAT NEED TO “JUST GROW UP.”

In this passage, we see the apostle Paul rebuking this church for their lack of spiritual growth. He tells them that they are not spiritually ready, but still of the flesh. They are still content with spiritual milk, when they should be longing for solid food. There is jealousy and strife among them—signs of the flesh! Paul brings to light that they have been making distinctions among church leaders, and the divisions that are being made are revealing their immaturity. They are elevating one church leader over another. Paul does not see the growth that he was hoping to see from this church. Paul informs them it is rather silly and immature to boast about any church leader. God had assigned gifts to Paul and Apollos. These gifts were different, but they weren’t in opposition to one another, but rather complementary. Every church leader is merely an instrument in the hands of God. Ultimately, it is not the church leader who grows a church, but it is God who gives growth.

James 3 reminds us that jealousy and selfish ambition are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. Where there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there will be disorder. Think about your life. Is there any hidden jealousy in your heart? Any selfish ambition? Are you causing divisions in your church instead of promoting unity within the body of Christ? Are you settling for spiritual milk instead of receiving the incredible blessing of spiritual solid food? Ask the Lord to give you cravings for scripture, prayer, and evangelism.

JUNE 6

1 Corinthians 3:16-23



CHOOSING WHERE TO LIVE CAN BE A STRESSFUL DECISION.

When God created mankind, he created mankind in such a way that he could be in fellowship with man. In the Old Testament, the temple was of significant value. In Exodus 25, God instructed the Israelites to construct a place where he could “dwell in their midst” (Exodus 25:8). Not everyone was allowed inside the temple. Even once inside the temple, there were different levels of importance. The holy of holies is where the presence of God dwelt. When Solomon’s temple was destroyed, from a Jew’s perspective, God no longer dwelt among them.

John 1:14 says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” With the coming of Jesus, God once again demonstrated his desire to dwell with man, but in Acts 1, we see Jesus ascending back into heaven. The disciples were confused, despite the fact Jesus had already said it was better that he go, so the Helper could come.

In verses 16-17, Paul makes an incredible claim. We have the privilege of seeing the fullness of God’s plan. Out of all the options God had, God chose to dwell in you. Did that truth just go over your head? God chose to dwell in you, follower of Christ! He does not live in our church buildings. We cannot leave him behind on Sunday afternoons while we live our lives the rest of the week in sin. We are the temple! Wherever we go, we take God with us. Oh, may that incredible truth sink into our hearts. May we have boldness, knowing the Helper is always with us.

JUNE 7

1 Corinthians 4:1-21



WHAT IF YOU WERE ENTRUSTED WITH THE CURE FOR CANCER? YOU HAD THE ONLY SOLUTION TO THIS WORLDWIDE PANDEMIC. HOW WOULD YOU TREAT THAT FORMULA? WOULD YOU BE CARELESS OR WOULD YOU GO TO EXTREME MEASURES TO BE SURE IT GOT INTO THE CORRECT HANDS?

We have already seen, in the first few chapters of 1 Corinthians, that God has revealed himself to us, and he dwells in us. Now in verse 1 of chapter 4, Paul says that you have been entrusted with the mysteries of God. As stewards, we must be found trustworthy. The world is sick and dying. Sin has infected all mankind. No one has escaped its power. Eternal death is what sickness of sin produces, but you have the cure; the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In verse 16, Paul urges that we be imitators of him. He makes a bold statement, but he lives up to the claim. Paul gave up everything worldly after he realized he had been entrusted with the mysteries. He gave up his position in society, his wealth, earthly security, and safety. He risked it all to proclaim the gospel wherever he went. He knew what it was to live in darkness, therefore once he experienced the cure for sin's curse, he spent the rest of his life telling others how they too could be saved.

How do you treat the mysteries of God for which you have been entrusted? Are you ashamed of them? Do you keep them to yourself, as the people who God has placed around you coast through life without hope, headed for an eternity separated from God? Or do you imitate Paul? Are you willing to risk it all so that others might know the hope of Christ?

JUNE 8

1 Corinthians 5:1-13



CHAPTER 5 IS ONE OF THE MOST DISTURBING CHAPTERS IN THE ENTIRE NEW TESTAMENT.

In this chapter, we see a man having some type of inappropriate relationship with his father's wife, and the church is paying no mind to any of this. Paul illustrates the problem by using a metaphor about yeast. He explains that if someone does not quickly address this situation then the entire congregation will be affected.

This chapter addresses a controversial topic within our culture today: judging others. We are reminded of this truth in James 4:12, "There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?" James reminds his readers that only God can judge others. So how can James condemn judging yet Paul condone it? In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul makes an important distinction on the topic of judging. Paul writes in verse 12-13, "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside."

It is clear from this passage that Christians should not judge outsiders, those who are not yet Christians. Why? Because God will ultimately judge them. But there is an absolute clear command for Christians to judge other Christians within the church. Paul is trying to help this church to understand that one sin, that is not repented of, can damage the entire congregation. Take a moment to hold the mirror up to your own life. Do you see any sin in your life that needs to be confessed? Do you understand the seriousness of your sin? Take some time to read Joshua 7 as a reminder of how your personal sin can impact the lives of others.

JUNE 9

1 Corinthians 6:1-11



PAUL ASKS THE CHURCH IF THEY ARE AWARE THAT THE UNRIGHTEOUS WILL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD (1 CORINTHIANS 6:9).

Then he proceeds to give a very convicting list of unrighteous deeds which we can all identify with to some extent. This is very troubling news for mankind. Quoting a psalm, Paul informs the church at Rome, “None is righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). Therefore, if none is righteous, and only the righteous will inherit the kingdom of God, where do we find hope?

Then, in verse 11, Paul gives the good news: You were washed! You were sanctified! You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God! This is the testimony of every follower of Christ. Every single one of us. We were unrighteous, and therefore we could not inherit the kingdom of God. There was no hope, whatsoever. But then God came to us, in all of our unrighteousness, and he washed us. He took our punishment and came to dwell in us! May we never get over this truth. May we never boast in anything other than the amazing grace of Jesus Christ! May we never look down on a person caught in sin, knowing that we too once walked in sin! We too were caught up in the world’s passion and fleshly desires, even if we came to know Christ at a young age. May we instead pray earnestly and proclaim the gospel faithfully and know that God still saves! There is hope for everyone. You have a powerful testimony about God’s transforming work in your life!

Who can you share this hope with today?

JUNE 10

1 Corinthians 6:12-20



THE DIVERSITY AMONG GOD'S CREATION IS FASCINATING. IT'S AMAZING HOW HE THOUGHT THROUGH SO MANY FACETS OF CREATION.

Many creatures are created with a defensive mechanism. For some creatures that defense mechanism could be claws or teeth, but for the blue tailed skink God gave a unique way to escape its predators. As the name states, these lizards have bright blue tails. When being attacked, the predator usually goes for the bright blue tail. This plays into the skink's strengths. God created the skink with something called autotomy or self-amputation. The skink has the ability to just leave its tail behind, and while the predator has a hold of its tail, the lizard now has a chance to flee from the predator.

In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Paul commands the church to flee from sexual immorality (verse 18). This is a common command in Paul's letters. He often speaks of fleeing from worldly pleasures and pursuing the things of God. The word "fleeing" indicates the urgency of the situation. A skink flees, because it realizes its life is in danger. We must flee, because sin threatens our spiritual life. A believer's body is the temple of Christ. We represent him. We must glorify God in our body.

Do you have a plan for fleeing from sin or do you see how close you can get to sin before it so easily entangles you? All sin is serious. We must hate our sin and repent of it. The Bible describes Satan as a lion ready to devour. Satan would love nothing more than to distract you with worldly passions. Think about the sin in your life. Confess, repent, and come up with a plan to flee from it today!

JUNE 11

1 Corinthians 7:1-16



PAUL IS DEMANDING THE CHURCH AT CORINTH TO FIGHT FOR UNITY.

It is important to remember that church unity first begins in the home. But just like in a lot of the churches in America today, divorce was an issue in Corinth. God has revealed himself to mankind as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God in three persons. The doctrine of the trinity is the ultimate example of unity. Within the trinity, there is perfect harmony. There are no divisions, no dissension, no rivalry, and no jealousy among the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit.

In Genesis 2:24, God establishes the first marriage. When he brings Adam and Eve together, he commands the man, “To hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” The command to hold fast shows God’s desire for the husband and wife to remain together. Both Jesus and Paul reiterate this principle in the New Testament. God designed marriage to be a reflection of the trinity. One God in three persons. The Godhead is distinct in roles, but equal in value. The same is true about marriage. Within a marriage, the two shall become one. Within the marriage, the husband and wife have different roles, yet they are equal in value. When couples divorce, they do not reflect the unity of the trinity. They break the bond that God said should never be broken. There are several reasons why couples divorce. One reason is because the husband or the wife allowed someone else to share within that unity. Typically, affairs do not happen overnight.

If you are married, take a moment and ask God to show you if you are allowing the unity of your marriage to be broken. If you are single, think of how you could encourage one of the marriages in your church.

JUNE 12

1 Corinthians 7:17-24



THIS IS AN IMPORTANT PASSAGE THAT SHOWS SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT HAS HAPPENED FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT TO THE NEW TESTAMENT.

When God made his covenant with Abraham, one distinctive found in this covenant was that every male child of Abraham's family would be circumcised (Genesis 17:10). Circumcision would be a sign between God and Abraham's family. In Genesis 17:14, God gives a strict warning, "Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people." If a Jew did not circumcise their child, then that child would be cut off from the promises of God. No Jewish parent in their right mind would ever leave their child uncircumcised.

Now, fast forward over 2,000 years and Paul basically says circumcision is not that important. Paul writes, "For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God" (7:19). The Jews had basically boiled their righteousness down to their own works. Paul is trying to help this church understand that there should be no divisions over who and who is not circumcised. Salvation has always been about a condition of the heart. This should be nothing new to a Jew. Deuteronomy 30:6 says, "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."

This is still a struggle for the church today. People within the church are still trying to earn their righteousness through their works without ever being renewed in their heart. Do you believe in salvation by faith but live as if your works sustain your faith? Pray that God would help you to rest in his grace.

JUNE 13

1 Corinthians 7:25-40



PAUL KNEW THAT HAVING A GOOD MARRIAGE TAKES A LOT WORK.

“The grass is always greener on the other side” is a common phrase used in our culture. The problem with the phrase is, it just isn’t biblical. Simply changing your situation does not fix the real problem. Sometimes people pursue marriage, because they think being married will make them happy. God does desire for married couples to be happy within their marriage, but the primary purpose for marriage is not to make people happy.

There is an obvious and important truth found in the middle of this passage. Paul writes in verse 28 that married couples will have worldly troubles. Notice, he does not say, “could” or “might” have worldly troubles, but “will” have worldly troubles. Paul encourages those who are currently single to remain single, so that they will be spared the worldly difficulties of marriage. It is common for couples pursuing marriage to focus on the “for better” part of the marriage vows and ignore the “or for worse” line in the vows.

Paul is trying to encourage the unmarried individuals in the church to see what an incredible opportunity they have. Earlier in this chapter, Paul reminds those who are married that they belong to their partner. They don’t have the freedom to just go around the world on mission trips, but a single man or woman does have that freedom to simply go.

If you are single, are you content? Is having Christ enough for you? How are you taking advantage of being single? How could you uniquely serve your congregation and the kingdom of God?

JUNE 14

1 Corinthians 8:1-3



HOW MANY BIBLE VERSES DO YOU KNOW? HOW MANY BOOKS HAVE YOU READ THIS YEAR? HOW MANY LETTERS DO YOU HAVE AFTER YOUR NAME?

What did Paul claim to know in Chapter 2? “For I have decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:2). Paul was a highly educated man. He was a trained scholar. He had a lot of “knowledge”, but he “decided” to know nothing except Jesus. He knew boasting in his knowledge was counter productive. He knew his knowledge of the Mosaic Law was not going save anyone, but only God could change the hearts of man. Therefore he preached “Christ and him crucified.”

This world is full of people who claim to be wise, but the knowledge of man is foolishness to God. Rather, God has called his people to love as he loves. So if we love God, we will also love the people he created in his image.

When is last time you engaged in an argument, because you insisted you were “right”? What emotions were you feeling? Anger or love? Were you acting out of a heart of pride or a heart of love? Yes, we must stand firm on solid biblical doctrine. There is an absolute truth, and we must love to abide in and spread that truth. As we present the truth of God, we must do so in love.

How could you love someone today? In what specific ways can you humble yourself today and boast only in Christ?

JUNE 15

1 Corinthians 8:4-13



A SIMPLE DEFINITION OF HUMILITY IS FREEDOM FROM PRIDE—PUTTING SOMEONE ELSE'S INTERESTS BEFORE YOUR OWN.

This is a passage that shouts the importance of humility. The first few verses challenge us that love is more important than knowledge. We must have a solid grasp on that concept before we can even understand the rest of the chapter.

Knowledge tells us that we can eat meat offered to idols, because those gods are not real. A humble love tells us that if it causes a weaker brother to stumble, it is not worth it. Yes, we have freedom in Christ, but we must not abuse our rights. Verse nine reminds us, “But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.” Verses 11 and 12 explain why love is more important than knowledge, “And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, in sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.” Paul uses powerful language. What was once a freedom, becomes a sin when it causes a weaker brother to stumble. In our pride, we destroy our brothers in Christ, for whom he died!

Paul's application is beautiful in verse 13, “Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.” Paul understands the importance of humility. It's not about being right. It's about loving people enough to give up our rights, so that they can experience the love of Christ. Christ was the ultimate example of this, when he gave up everything to come and die a sinner's death for our sake. How can we humble ourselves and love like Christ today?

JUNE 16

1 Corinthians 9:1-14



SOME PREACHERS TODAY ARE KNOWN FOR THEIR EXTRAVAGANCE. THEY LIVE IN LUXURIOUS HOMES, DRIVE EXPENSIVE CARS, AND EVEN FLY IN PRIVATE JETS.

This is often used as a justification for not supporting local churches and Christian ministries. However, far more preachers live extremely frugal lives and barely manage to survive financially.

Is there biblical justification for the financial support of pastors, missionaries, and other Christian workers? The answer is yes. Though it is secondary to the point of his message, Paul clearly affirmed his right to be financially supported by those to whom he ministered.

In the previous chapter Paul established the principle that our Christian liberty should be limited by our concern for the welfare of fellow Christians. In this chapter, he continues the discussion by illustrating how he followed this principle in his own life. Though he had the right to be financially supported he would not take advantage of it.

The question is, why? Paul gives two reasons. First, he did not want to lose his reward for preaching the gospel without charge. He was compelled to preach the gospel. It was not an option. What was an option was whether to accept support for doing so. If he did it without charge there was satisfaction and joy as a reward. Second, he wanted nothing to hinder his reaching the lost with the gospel.

Those who are called to preach the gospel are compelled to do so. That is why many are willing to continue in ministry even when it is difficult financially. They have a right to support whether they choose to accept it or not.

JUNE 17

1 Corinthians 9:19-27



WE DO NOT WANT TO OFFEND UNBELIEVERS BUT IN OUR ZEAL TO RELATE TO THEM WE MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO OFFEND GOD.

I read of an army sergeant who threw his muddy boots at a Christian private as he knelt by his bunk in prayer. They hit him in the head, but he went on praying. In the morning, the sergeant found his boots beside his bunk beautifully polished. That act of service on the part of that private eventually resulted in the sergeant's salvation. That is the attitude that we all must adopt: "I am a slave to all, so that I may win more."

What is clear in this passage is that Paul has an all-consuming passion to win people to Jesus Christ. Five times in four verses he said his aim was to win people. It was so important to him that he was willing to give up any personal freedom or right to do so.

Paul is not talking about adapting the message of the gospel to avoid offending people. He is talking about how we relate to those we hope to evangelize. The message of the cross is often offensive, but we should not be personally offensive in neutral matters of custom or culture. Winning others to Christ requires presenting the gospel to lost people without needlessly offending them.

Our goal should be to remove cultural barriers that distract or offend those we are trying to reach. We don't want our outward appearance or political views to be the issue. We want the gospel to be the issue.

This is not always easy to do. It requires balance. We need to be distinct in our lifestyle so that we don't compromise the gospel.

JUNE 18

1 Corinthians 10:1-13



EVERYONE FACES TEMPTATION. THE DEVIL, THE WORLD, AND OUR FLESHLY NATURES WORK TOGETHER TO TEMPT US TO BREAK GOD'S LAWS.

The good news is that God provides "the way of escape" each time temptations arise. We can experience victory. How?

Realize that temptation is universal. "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man." All people experience temptation. Satan wants us to think that we are the only ones struggling with a specific sin. The truth is, there is nothing you are struggling with that others have not also struggled with and even overcome.

Remember that God is faithful. "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able." God reliably prevents us from being overwhelmed by temptation. As temptations increase in both frequency and intensity his grace and strength increase as well. He never leaves us or forsakes us.

Recognize that escape is available. "With the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." When we are tempted God provides the way of escape. For Joseph, it was fleeing (Genesis 39:12). For Jesus, it was fasting and praying and quoting Scripture (Luke 4:1-13). For the disciples, it was to "watch and pray" (Matthew 26:41). Whenever we face temptation, we must seek his way of escape.

Are you being enticed to sin? Jesus will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability to overcome. With each temptation, he faithfully gives the way to victory. Find the way and follow it today. Walk obediently in his way of escape and you will triumph.

JUNE 19

1 Corinthians 10:14-31



WHEN THE IDENTITY OF A FOOD IS IN QUESTION EVERYONE CAUTIOUSLY INQUIRES AS TO WHAT IT IS THEY WILL BE EATING.

Until I began traveling to East Asia, I never realized how big a deal the food we eat can be. Most Americans have difficulty adjusting to the change in cuisine, especially when the food offered them still bears a striking similarity to its appearance before it was cooked.

The Corinthians were also concerned about what was for dinner. But the issue wasn't taste. The question was, "Is it permissible for us to eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols?" Some Corinthians felt free to eat any meat whatsoever, even meats offered to idols. Others were so sensitive to this matter that they would not eat anything without first knowing its origin.

Paul warns the uninhibited against overconfidence. He uses as an example the ancient Israelites who fell into idolatry and were severely disciplined. They should do what their fathers failed to do—"flee from idolatry." He sets the table of the Lord alongside the table of pagan idolatry to show that just as participating in communion unites us with Christ. Participating in idol worship unites us with demons.

Paul points out that the liberated Corinthians had a right to eat meats purchased at the market but that doing so could have a negative effect on those believers who could not eat with a clear conscience. Not to eat would require self-discipline and self-sacrifice like a runner in a race.

Paul gives two guiding principles concerning the exercise of Christian liberties. First, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do should glorify God. And second, our actions should not offend others but benefit them, especially the lost.

JUNE 20

1 Corinthians 11:1-16



THE ROLE OF WOMEN IS A HOT BUTTON ISSUE IN THE CHURCH AS WELL AS SOCIETY. THE APOSTLE PAUL'S STATEMENT IN VERSE 2 THAT "THE MAN IS THE HEAD OF THE WOMAN" IS OFTEN AT THE CENTER OF THIS CONTROVERSY.

It is important to note that Paul makes no distinction between men and women in terms of personal worth, intellect or spirituality. He does, however, acknowledge that God made a difference between men and women and that each has a unique role and function in God's order.

In verse 3 he establishes a divine principle that shows that woman's subordination to man is part of a universal principle that includes even the godhead. The Father is the head over Christ, Christ is the head of the man, and the man is the head of the woman.

In his redemptive ministry, the Son was subject to the Father even though He is equal to the Father. Likewise, the woman is subject to the man even though in Christ she is equal to the man. In that culture, wearing a head covering symbolized this submission.

The Apostle gives another reason for submission. He points out that man was created first and that woman was created for man. Even so, in God's design they are both physically and spiritually interdependent (11:8-12). Man's authority is not inherent but delegated.

Finally, Paul says that nature itself teaches the need for a woman to be covered. Her long hair is given to her as a natural covering. It is unlikely that Paul meant for all women in every culture to wear a head-covering, but he did expect them to use their long hair as a covering and as a symbol of their submission to God's order.

JUNE 21

1 Corinthians 11:17-22



THE OBSERVANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER CAN BE ONE OF THE MOST MEANINGFUL TIMES FOR A BELIEVER. IT CAN ALSO QUICKLY DEGENERATE INTO A PERVERTED RITUAL THAT DISHONORS CHRIST AND BRINGS JUDGMENT UPON THE PARTICIPANTS.

The early church apparently held love feasts (Jude 12) that closed with the observance of communion. They had turned this sacred time into a gluttonous, drunken revelry that divided the church. The wealthy, selfishly brought abundant provision for themselves but would not share with the poorer members, letting them go hungry and adding to the sense of division.

Paul condemns this behavior and reminds them that the true meaning of the Lord's supper is to remember Christ's sacrifice on our behalf. His description of Christ's final meal with his disciples is beautifully simple and succinct. Most conservative scholars believe this letter was written before any of the gospels. If that is the case this is the first biblical instruction given about the Lord's supper and was received by Paul directly from the Lord. Most communion tables are inscribed with Jesus' famous words revealed in this passage, "In Remembrance of Me".

Since this observance is so significant it is important that we prepare our hearts when we come to the Lord's table. Paul warns against receiving the element of communion "in an unworthy manner". They were surprised to learn that much of the sickness and death among them was the result of God's discipline for their unrepentant sin and disrespect of the Lord's supper. If we are to participate in a worthy manner, we must examine our own hearts, judge our sins, and confess them to the Lord.

JUNE 22

1 Corinthians 12:1-13



THE NEXT THREE CHAPTERS COMPOSE THE MOST EXTENSIVE TREATMENT OF THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Some members misunderstood gifts of the Spirit so completely that they regarded their own spiritual gifts with pride and exclusiveness. In addition, they tended to place an inordinate value on one of the most dramatic of them, namely, speaking in tongues. The conflict that surrounded this gift resulted in further division of a church already torn by factions. Ironically, rather than operating by the Spirit they were functioning in the flesh. Paul devotes more space to this problem than any other.

The Apostle's first step in resolving this issue was to focus on the oneness of the church. He pointed out four ways that the Spirit brings about spiritual unity.

First, we confess the same Lord (12:1-3) The ultimate test of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit is the confession that Jesus is Lord. Only through the Spirit can a person honestly affirm that reality. This stands in stark contrast to their life as pagans.

Second, we rely upon the same God (12:4-6). There are different gifts, different ministries, and different results from using those gifts but they all come from the same divine source. "The same Spirit ... the same Lord... the same God" points to the triune nature of God.

Third, we minister to the same body (12:7-11). These gifts are sovereignly given by God for the good of the entire church, not for the enjoyment or exaltation of the individual.

Finally, we received the same baptism (12:12-13). The baptism of Spirit occurs at our spiritual conversion when we are plunged into the body of Christ by the Spirit himself.

JUNE 23

1 Corinthians 12:14-31



THE HUMAN BODY IS AN AMAZING COLLECTION OF PARTS, ORGANS AND BIOLOGICAL SYSTEMS CONTAINING NEARLY 100 TRILLION CELLS.

Modern science has identified at least eleven different systems that carry out specific functions necessary for everyday living. Each is incredibly complex. The skeletal system consists of 206 bones that are connected by tendons, ligaments and cartilage. The muscular system has about 650 muscles that integrates with the skeletal system to enable movement. The circulatory system includes the heart, also a muscle, which beats about 100,000 times a day pushing 2,000 gallons of blood through about 60,000 miles of blood vessels. No organ or system of the body functions independently of the others. These diverse systems function in unity.

Paul uses the analogy of a human body to show how the church is to function. As the body has many different parts that function in harmony, so the church, which is made up of people who are diverse in their spiritual gifts, is to function in harmonious unity.

The body of Christ needs different functions if it is live, grow and serve. As members of the body of Christ we should not compare ourselves to other members because each one is different and each one is important. This diversity is evidence of God's wisdom. In a healthy human body, the various members cooperate with each other and even compensate for each other when a crisis occurs. We can never say to one another, "I don't need you." The more we discover our dependence on one another the more we promote unity.

Paul reminds us that it is God who bestows the gifts and assigns the offices assuring that each local congregation has what it needs to function properly.

JUNE 24

1 Corinthians 13:1-13



SPIRITUAL GIFTS, NO MATTER HOW EXCITING AND WONDERFUL, ARE USELESS AND EVEN DESTRUCTIVE IF THEY ARE NOT ADMINISTERED IN LOVE.

The main evidence of maturity in the Christian life is a growing love for God and for his people, as well as a love for lost souls. It has well been said that love is the “circulatory system” of the body of Christ.

Context is critical to understanding this passage. Certainly, this comprehensive definition of love can be applied to the marriage relationship but it is secondary to the apostle’s emphasis. We must remember that Paul was addressing issues in the church such as the abuse of the gift of tongues, the envy of others’ gifts, selfishness, and impatience that threatened to divide the church.

For that reason, Paul extols three qualities of love that make it the “more excellent way.”

First, love gives ministry its value (13:1-3). Paul gives five examples of how his spiritual gifts might be used in admirable ways. However, he points out that these actions would be of no profit to him if they were exercised apart from love. Love translates our efforts into valuable service that enriches the church.

Second, love builds up others (13:4-7). The purpose of spiritual gifts is to edify the church (1 Corinthians 14:26). This requires love because love demands that we focus on others rather than on ourselves. This is really the essence of love. It is not self-centered. For this reason, it can be patient with others while seeking to build them up.

Third, love endures forever (13:8-13). Paul seems to indicate that the gifts related to divine revelation in the early church would cease with the completion of Scripture (13:8,10) but love will always be essential in the church.

JUNE 25

1 Corinthians 14:1-25



PAUL ADDRESSES THE MISUSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS (ESPECIALLY TONGUES) IN THE PUBLIC WORSHIP SERVICES OF THE CHURCH.

Contrary to the principle of love, many of the Corinthian believers wanted to build themselves up rather than build up their fellow believers. Paul reminded them that the primary purpose of spiritual gifts is the edification of the whole church (14:26). To edify means “to build up” in the sense of strengthening and encouraging believers in their faith (14:3).

Logically, for edification to occur, hearers must understand what is being said. For that reason, the gift of prophecy is preferred over speaking in tongues (14:1). Paul explained the superior value of prophecy over tongues by contrasting the two gifts.

While tongues are real languages, they cannot be understood unless translated. The person speaking in tongues may be enjoying his worship of God but he is benefiting only himself. Some people have the idea that speaking in a tongue is evidence of spiritual maturity, but Paul taught that it is possible to exercise the gift in an immature manner.

Prophecy, on the other hand, is understood and builds up the hearers. This emphasizes the importance of doctrinal teaching. Worship must be based on truth, or it may become superstitious emotionalism. Christians need to know what they believe and why they believe it.

Three simple illustrations, the musical notes of a flute, the battle call of a bugle, and the words of a foreign language, all reinforce that clear communication is critical to edification. The private use of spiritual gifts may edify the user but it will not edify the church when the message is not clear. We need to emphasize sharing the Word of God so that the church will be strengthened and grow.

JUNE 26

1 Corinthians 14:26-40



HAVING CLEARLY ESTABLISHED THAT PREACHING AND TEACHING TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER EVERYTHING ELSE IN THE CHURCH, PAUL DEVOTES THE REST OF THE CHAPTER TO THE IMPORTANCE OF ALL THINGS BEING DONE “PROPERLY AND IN AN ORDERLY MANNER.”

First, he talks about the importance of order regarding the use of tongues. Tongues are not to be allowed without interpretation. Only two or three may speak in any service and they must do so in turn, not at the same time.

Similarly, only two or three prophets are permitted to speak, and the others are to test their messages to see if they come from God. Today, we evaluate whether the message is consistent with Scripture. If a speaker gets “carried away,” it is proof that the Spirit is not speaking; for when the Spirit is at work, there is self-control.

It seems that some women in the assembly were creating disruptions by asking questions out of place. When men or women act out of place in the church, they tear down the church instead of building it up. Paul also lays a responsibility upon the men; they were to teach their wives spiritual truths, but to do so at home. Unfortunately, in many families it is the wife who must teach the husband!

Finally, Paul says, if you are truly spiritual you will prove it by obeying the Word of God. The Spirit of God never works apart from or contrary to Scripture. This is a critical principle to remember when it comes to spiritual gifts. We cannot be guided by someone’s subjective emotional experience, but we can be guided by the unchanging, objective Word of God.

JUNE 27

1 Corinthians 15:1-4



OUR WORLD RARELY HEARS GOOD NEWS. CHAOS, TRAGEDY, AND WICKEDNESS DOMINATE THE HEADLINES.

Christians have been entrusted with the “gospel,” or “good news,” and people desperately need to hear it.

The gospel must be preached. Paul devoted his life to proclaiming the good news “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day...” (15:3-4). He was “...*not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*” (Romans 1:16). He sensed a divine obligation to declare it. In this sense, all Christians are “preachers.” We must verbally share Christ with lost people.

The gospel must be received. When Paul preached to the Corinthians they willingly “received” the gospel. They were not manipulated or forced to do so. They responded to God’s grace. Today, people must still receive Christ. Merely believing facts about Jesus does not save. Demons do that (James 2:19). We must believe the gospel and also receive Christ (John 1:12).

The gospel brings salvation. Paul “preached” the gospel, the Corinthians “received” it, and as a result, they were “saved.” Their salvation allowed them to “stand” spiritually. Though they had lived sinful lives, the gospel had changed them completely. That same gospel will transform people in our day as well.

This world needs to hear some good news and Christians have the best news available! We simply need to communicate it. Many will reject it but some will respond positively to what they hear. Like Paul, we need to open our mouths and “make known” to them the good news!

JUNE 28

1 Corinthians 15:12-34



PEOPLE TODAY ARE UNCERTAIN ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS TO A PERSON AFTER THEY DIE.

Under the influence of Hollywood, some think we become angels or ghosts, or that we are reincarnated. Others say as some of the Corinthians did, “There is no resurrection from the dead.” Paul strongly refutes this assertion, offering four evidences for bodily resurrection.

Historical evidence (15:1-11): The Corinthians did not doubt Christ’s resurrection. It was supported by the message of the gospel and the testimony of witnesses. Since Christ was raised, resurrection from the dead is obviously possible. On the other hand, unless men in general can’t be resurrected, Christ could not have been raised. The two resurrections stand or fall together. Christ’s resurrection assures the reality our resurrection.

Personal evidence (15:12-19): If there is no resurrection the gospel was a lie, their faith was vain, and they were still in their sins!

Doctrinal evidence (15:20-28): The first Adam brought sin and death into the world, The Last Adam (Christ), has conquered death. Christ is the first of a great harvest yet to come. When he comes, the dead in Christ will be raised and all things will be put under his feet, including death.

Practical evidence (15:29-34): They were practicing baptism which is a symbol of death, burial, and resurrection. The ordinance has no meaning if there is no resurrection of the dead. Paul cites the many dangers in his ministry, and says in effect, “Surely it is foolish for me to risk my life daily if there is no resurrection! If there is no resurrection, then we ought to eat, drink, and be merry! Enjoy life while we can!”

Do not be deceived by bad influences. There is a bodily resurrection of the dead (15:33).

JUNE 29

1 Corinthians 15:35-58



RESURRECTION IS AN AMAZING CONCEPT TO PONDER. IT MAKES US ASK, “HOW ARE THE DEAD RAISED?”

Paul answers this question using an illustration from nature. A seed that is planted dies and bears fruit, and the fruit, while identified with the original seed, is different from it.

The resurrection body, like the bodies in the heavens, will have its own kind of glory. It is not the same body that was planted, but there is continuity between the buried body and the resurrection body.

The physical body laid in the grave undergoes corruption, but the resurrection body will not decay; it will have power and glory.

Paul deals with the Second Coming of Christ and what it means to both the living and the dead (15:51). “We shall not all sleep (die),” because some saints will be alive when Christ returns; “but we shall all be changed.” This mystery concerns the rapture of the church. When Christ returns, the dead shall be raised first, the living caught up with them, and all will be changed to be like Christ. And all of this will happen in the twinkling of an eye.

Bee stings hurt badly. That’s because bees inject venom that causes pain, swelling, and sometimes anaphylaxis or death. Fortunately, for those who have an allergic reaction an injection of epinephrine can counteract the effects of the venom. Yes, the sting still hurts but its deadly effects are defeated. Death is our greatest enemy but through Christ’s resurrection death has been swallowed up in victory. For the Christian, the sting has been removed.

We can faithfully serve Christ knowing our work will count for eternity. Because the tomb is empty, our faith is not empty!

JUNE 30

1 Corinthians 16:1-24



AFTER HEARING THE GLORIOUS TRUTHS OF THE RESURRECTION, WE ARE BROUGHT BACK TO THE PRACTICAL REALITY OF EVERYDAY LIFE.

Doctrine and duty go together. Christ's resurrection power motivates us to give and to serve.

"Now concerning the collection" are not words most Christians want to hear. But to the credit of the believers at Corinth, they had asked Paul about the collection he was taking for the poor saints in Jerusalem. In response, Paul shares some vital principles for giving that not only apply to that offering but to Christian giving in general.

Giving is to be an act of worship. The early church met on "the first day of every week" (or the Lord's Day) in recognition of the resurrection of Christ. Each member was to be prepared to give his share for that week. Giving was a part of their worship.

Giving is to be regular. An offering was to be given "every week" or in accordance with whatever regular pattern they received money (prospered). They were to "put aside and save" these gifts so that the offering would be ready when Paul arrived.

Giving is to be personal and individual. It is specified that "each one of you" is to contribute.

Giving is to be proportionate. They were to give as they had "prospered." Paul does not specify a percentage. The only principle is that as the Lord gives us more, we should give more. Giving should be from the outflow of God's grace in our lives not the result of pressure or guilt.

Giving is to be responsible. The churches appointed delegates to help Paul manage the offering and take it safely to Jerusalem. This demonstrated financial accountability.

JULY 1

2 Corinthians 1:1



LETTERS WERE WRITTEN ON A SCROLL IN THE FIRST CENTURY. IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR THE SENDER TO IDENTIFY HIMSELF AT THE BEGINNING OF THE LETTER.

The apostle begins this letter by identifying his authorship of the epistle. He also identifies his apostolic authority to write down the message from God and give it to the believers in the southern area of Greece, and specifically, to those in the city of Corinth. The Corinthian church had come into existence during Paul's second missionary journey. He had later written to them (1 Corinthians) about several spiritual discrepancies, and less than honorable behavior, among some of the brethren in that great city. After writing his first letter, and during his further travels, Paul had come in contact with Titus, who told him that the first letter was generally well received and proved to be most effective. However, he also learned from Titus that there was still a major problem there. Titus informed him that there was a faction that refused to accept that Paul was a genuine apostle thereby refusing to accept his authority to speak for God.

Before Paul could come to them in Corinth again, he penned this letter and sent it ahead by the hand of Titus. Paul defends his Apostolic authority. His fiery personality and intense emotions are probably more evident in this epistle than in any other of his writings.

This book has less emphasis on doctrinal issues than most of his other writings, but it does carry more personal experiences such as his "thorn in the flesh" and his being "caught up into the third heaven", as well as defending his apostolic office.

The theme of the book is that one should always be faithful to Christ. That is a truth we all need to remember today.

JULY 2

2 Corinthians 1:2



IF THERE IS ONE THING CONSISTENT IN THE WRITINGS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL, IT WOULD MOST CERTAINLY BE THE GREETING THAT HE SHARED IN EVERY SINGLE EPISTLE PRESERVED FOR US IN THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE.

The two Greek words are “charis”, translated “grace”, and “eirene”, translated “peace”. Obviously, Paul reminds his readers that these two precious concepts come from God.

What greater gift should we wish for our brothers and sisters in Christ than the unmerited favor of our Heavenly Father? Each of us have, through faith in Christ, received the gracious gift of God, resulting in being declared righteous by God, himself. It involves more than mere forgiveness of transgressions. It involves more than pardon from the penalty of sin. It is something that God alone can do for us. It is justification. It brings us into the family of God, through the most unique relationship that can exist between the creature and his Creator. The best adjective John Newton could come up with in regard to this grace was “amazing.” Paul understood that we have not been chosen to be a reservoir of grace, but to be a conduit of grace to others.

The other key word in his uniform greeting is “eirene” which denotes “rest, quietness, and peace.” One of Jesus’ messianic titles was “Prince of Peace” and he, through God the Father’s grace, is the only source of true peace. The one who calmed the raging sea can bring peace to the most storm tossed soul.

I can think of no better greeting that I could share with anyone than that of “grace to you” and “peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

JULY 3

2 Corinthians 1:3-7



ALL OF US HAVE BEEN IN A STATE OF DISCOMFORT MANY TIMES IN OUR LIVES.

Our discomfort has included such simple things as colic or diaper rash in infancy. As we grew, we have experienced many other symptoms of discomfort from something simple like hunger or an upset stomach to serious illness. Discomfort is not always a physical. Financial, familial, and emotional issues can bring about great mental discomfort as well.

Anyone who thinks that being a child of God will make them immune to problems is sadly mistaken. In this flesh, we will always be subject to physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. Tribulations and even persecution can, and do, come to believers.

In verses three through seven of 2 Corinthians 1, the apostle makes reference to afflictions and suffering six times. There is a great deal of hurting going on in the lives of God's people. Satan cannot take from us what Christ has purchased for us, but he does seem to have an inside track on stealing our joy and marring our testimony.

I am thankful that our God is the "God of all comfort". He is able to ease all the pain and suffering the enemy can throw our way! In these five verses, Paul makes reference to the comfort of God *ten* times!

Just as we are designed to be conduits of God's grace, and not just reservoirs of it, we are also called to comfort those who are undergoing suffering and affliction. In light of his love and care for us, let us be aware of those who need to be touched by those of us who are representatives of the God of all comfort!

JULY 4

2 Corinthians 1:8-9



IREAD A QUOTE IN THIS MORNING'S PAPER QUOTING A FORMER HEROIN ADDICT WHO WAS TALKING ABOUT THE MOMENT WHEN HE REALIZED HIS LIFE WAS AT THE LOWEST POINT IT COULD POSSIBLY BE.

He said, "I knew I was hitting rock bottom, but I had no idea that rock bottom had a basement! I couldn't get any lower than where I was."

Have you ever been to a place in your life where it seems that you are in a situation that just can't get any worse? What do you do? Your resources are depleted. You have no support network. Family and friends seem to have vanished. Perhaps it's financial. Perhaps it involves some addiction. Maybe it involves a serious medical situation. Your life seems to be as good as over. What do you do?

Maybe you have been there. Perhaps you are traveling in that deep gorge now. If not, it's very likely that you will experience this crushing reality. Helpless. Hopeless. In despair. All of us are likely to find ourselves at this desolate place at some time or another in our lives. No one is immune. Why does God allow this to happen to us, especially those of us who seek to serve him?

Paul finds himself in such a place. Notice that he says "Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death" (1:9). It can't get any worse than that. Yet notice what he says next. When we come to the end of ourselves, God's purpose is obviously to teach us to rely fully on him – the "God who raises the dead!" (1:9). No situation is hopeless to our God!

JULY 5

2 Corinthians 1:21-22



ONE COULD CERTAINLY SAY THAT THE BIBLE IS A BOOK OF GOD'S PROMISES TO HIS PEOPLE.

The Bible is full of promises. One scholar has identified 3,573 specific promises in God's Word. The word "promise," itself, appears fifty times in the Bible.

The first promise in the Bible is found in Genesis 3:15, and the last one is in Revelation 22:20. The former is the promise of the coming Messiah who would "crush the head" of Satan. The latter is a promise of Jesus' coming again. In 1 Corinthians 1:20, Paul tells us, "... all the promises of God find their yes in him." All of the promises of God are guaranteed by our Lord Jesus Christ.

We sometimes make promises and fail to follow through. But not our great God. Consider the Bible truth found in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." God has guaranteed his promises to us through his son.

When my wife and I signed a contract to buy our first little house, several decades ago, we promised to pay the purchase price over several years of monthly installments. To seal the deal, we wrote a check with a sizable deposit to "guarantee" that we would fulfill the terms of the contract.

As Christians, when we came to repentance and trusted in Jesus as our only hope of salvation, God placed his guarantee on our lives. We can know because Paul tells us here in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, that Jesus himself has "put his seal on us." We belong to him, now and forever. We know that we are his, because he has given us the "guarantee" of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

JULY 6

2 Corinthians 2:14



IN THE GLORY DAYS OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE, DEFEAT WAS NEVER AN OPTION FOR THE LEGIONS OF SOLDIERS WHO FOUGHT IN CAMPAIGNS FROM SPAIN TO THE ARABIAN PENINSULA.

Rome ruled the world and was always seeking to extend its boundaries. Following a victorious battle, the conquering general would be paraded through the streets of Rome, before a cheering crowd, in a triumphal procession. This procession eventually ended before Caesar, who would place a crown of honor upon the victorious commander. It's the stuff epic Hollywood movies were made of.

For most of us who serve the Lord Jesus Christ, there does not appear to be a lot of visible glory in our day to day endeavors. We go about our jobs, family activities, shopping, house and yard work, child care, and recreational activities in a way that can usually be considered routine. Oh, there is a church service, here and there, to lift our spirits and encourage us to do our part in spreading the gospel, but nothing particularly glamorous in the eyes of the world. I'm thankful that things aren't always how they appear.

God has caused us to triumph in Christ. He guides our paths to victory, even when we may not recognize the reality of the battle around us. As we trust him to lead us in our daily lives, we don't always realize he is bringing us forth, in a triumphal procession, that one day will conclude, not before Caesar, but before the King of Kings!

As we follow Christ, we are spreading the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. Be faithful and faint not. Talk the talk and walk the walk, letting others see Jesus in you. The sweet aroma of the Savior will always come through as we walk in his footsteps! The crowds may not be cheering here, but they will when we get home!

JULY 7

2 Corinthians 2:17



WE LIVE IN A CULTURE THAT APPLAUDS CELEBRITIES. FROM THE WORLD OF SPORTS, TO ENTERTAINMENT, TO POLITICS, EVEN TO RELIGION, EVERYONE LOVES THE CELEBRITY.

In many cases, the celebrity status is simply a façade—a front to put up a certain glamorous image for the adoring fans. This fake front often masks who the person really is. In short, there is a lot of phoniness seen around us.

There's a lot of that going around in the religious realm today. For example, the smiling charlatan who recites a little routine about the Bible and then never proceeds to use any of it in his sermon. Or the charming and charismatic character who slays the unsuspecting person to the cheers of the crowd. Or the dramatic character who is encouraging you to send your generous offering to him and expect your “breakthrough” from God.

Sadly, the horizon is filled with spiritual snake oil salesmen who enrich themselves and cheapen the cause of Christ through their spiritual chicanery. Those types were around in Paul's day and they are still here in our time.

Paul the Apostle reminds us that we are to be different. We are not “peddlers of God's word” but “men of sincerity.” I thank God for the pastors who will stand for and proclaim the full counsel of God's Word. They can be found in many small country churches, brick buildings uptown, and in megachurches in the suburbs. They may be in thatched roof huts in far away places serving Christ. The settings may be different, but the message is the same.

Thank God for men he has commissioned who speak the truth in Christ, in the sight of God and men.

JULY 8

2 Corinthians 3:3-5



LIKE THE CORINTHIAN CHRISTIANS, LET US BE REMINDED OF GOD'S PURPOSE IN US.

I have long believed that the average Christian in America today is influenced more by their local Americanized Christian culture and extrabiblical traditions than they are by the Word of God. For the average unbeliever, watching many of us would only lead to confusion as to what a true Christ follower really is. My old pastor was fond of saying, "The only Bible most unsaved people will ever read is what they see in your life." If that is the case, we may be in big trouble!

The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians – and us – what we are. He says that we, who have trusted Christ are a letter from Christ, not the kind of letter written in ink or even chiseled into stone, but one written on the tablet of human hearts.

It begs the question, what kind of "epistle" are we?

We often complicate our "letter" through less than Christ-like behavior that would cause a non-believer to wonder, what makes that guy's life any better than mine? Our Lord wants his letter to be "easy reading", not a confusing and conflicting message to those who need to understand it the most.

We, who have truly come to God in repentance and trusted in Christ alone for salvation, are a valuable commodity for him in this depraved, and sin-darkened world. We truly are the only gospel that some people will ever read. My question is, are we transparent enough for lost people to be able to see Jesus in us?

Let us remember, "Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God" (3:4-5).

JULY 9

2 Corinthians 3:12



HOLY BOLDNESS IS A QUALITY THAT IS FOUND IN THOSE WHO HAVE A STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD.

Fear and a lack of boldness often causes us to commit the “sin of silence” when we have all been called to be witnesses for Christ.

In the book of Acts, following the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers, we see boldness as a benchmark of their behavior, even in the face of persecution. Note Acts 4:13, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.” Even after having been punished and threatened by the Sanhedrin Court and instructed never to speak in the name of Jesus again, what did Peter and John do?

It’s important to note what they *did not* do. They didn’t run out and find a good Christian attorney through the “Judean Center for Law and Justice”. They did not organize a march through the streets of Jerusalem, a protest picket at the temple complex, or a sit-in at the home of the high priest. They did not hit all the media outlets with their story, nor did they implore God to send down fire from heaven. Here is what they did do: they prayed.

Acts 4:29 and 31 read, “And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness... And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”

Resistance to our message will grow. We can expect increasing persecution. Nevertheless, pray for boldness to share the gospel message far and wide to those who need it in this sin darkened world.

JULY 10

2 Corinthians 4:3-5



THE WRITER OF HEBREWS TELLS US THAT JESUS IS “THE RADIANCE OF THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE EXACT IMPRINT OF HIS NATURE” (HEBREWS 1:3).

Isn't that a powerful statement? I confess that I don't always think of Jesus in that way, but I should. John tells us, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4-5).

Now consider that Paul is saying, in this passage of 2 Corinthians, that the reason the Good News of Jesus Christ is hidden from so many people is that Satan (the god of this world) has blinded the minds of unbelievers.

How has the enemy been able to blind people to the gospel?

First and foremost, he is the father of lies. Since his encounter with Eve in the garden, his lies have brought blindness to yielding souls. He blinds people to the knowledge of God with “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”. If the Prince of Darkness can make his three pronged attack strong enough, he knows it can veil the spiritual eyes of fallen man. The spiritual blindness is bad enough, but the worst part of the situation is that the victims are perishing! This is a desperate situation.

We won't rescue dying souls by studying demographics, marketing our churches, passionately fighting culture wars, coercion, or even through legislation. True life and light only comes through hearing the gospel. We must proclaim him and not ourselves.

JULY 11

2 Corinthians 4:9-10



ALL ANCIENT GREEKS WOULD UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT OF THE “BEMA” OR THE “JUDGMENT SEAT.”

The bema was an elevated seat that served two purposes. In Corinth it stood in the town square, where magistrates sat to hear cases and administer justice. It is also used in connection with the athletic games, where the winning athletes would stand after the contest to receive recognition and reward. The use of this term would not be lost on the Corinthian recipients.

This scripture reminds us that each of us as believers will one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ. This judgment is not to determine whether or not we are saved. Only the saved will be there. This is a judgment of believers only. Even though there is “no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1), Christians need to remember that God will still hold us responsible for what has been done in our bodies. I refer to this as our being assessed for our stewardship as to how we have utilized the gifts that God has placed in us. Paul also mentions the judgment seat in Romans 14:12 where he says that at that time, “So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.”

Even with the sobering knowledge that we will one day stand before Christ, there is another aspect of this that we should consider. In all aspects of our lives we should “make it our aim to please him” (4:9). That should be our ultimate goal—to live a life pleasing to the Master.

Let us live in a way that all we do will please him. “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:32).

JULY 12

2 Corinthians 4:14



THREE YEARS AGO, I WATCHED MY DAD'S HEALTH QUICKLY SPIRAL DOWN OVER A PERIOD OF FIVE WEEKS.

Although dealing with issues that an 87 year old man might be expected to have, in just over a month, I watched him go from living independently, coming and going as he pleased, and taking care of himself, to spending his last days descending into a painful death.

It was hard to watch—remembering the guy who had served the Lord so faithfully in bi-vocational ministry since the late 1940's. He was a busy evangelist for over four decades and continued in pastoring and in pulpit supply well into his 80's. I guess I just always thought, subconsciously, that he was invincible, but we all know that we're not.

When Dad made the conscious decision to forego any more dialysis, I wanted to make sure he understood the consequences. "Dad, if you stop, do you know what will happen?" I asked. "Yes. I'll go to heaven, and I am ready," came his strong reply.

The thing that impressed me the most as my dad lay dying was the same vibrant faith I had witnessed as a child. On the last day that he was able to communicate with us, I sat by his bedside and listened to him talk with visitors to his hospital room and several friends who had called on the phone. His message to every one of them was, "Next time I see you, it will be in heaven!"

He understood what Paul was saying as the apostle closed out the last of this chapter, "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (4:16-17).

My dad knew that the best was yet to come.

JULY 13

2 Corinthians 5:20-21



WHAT A MESSAGE! ONLY ONE SINLESS PERSON EVER WALKED THE FACE OF THIS EARTH, AND HE WAS OFFERED UP AS A SACRIFICE FOR OUR SINS, SO THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD MIGHT BE PLACED ON OUR ACCOUNT. WHAT A PICTURE OF LOVE. WHAT A STORY OF GRACE SO AMAZING.

This is too great a message to keep to ourselves. God wants every person on the planet to hear the message. It is a message of reconciliation. Paul tells us, in preceding verses, that God has reconciled sinful men to himself, and he has entrusted us to tell the story to others.

He has given us a ministry of reconciliation. Sin separates us all from God. Since man's fall in the garden, we have been carried far away from God. Our sin has separated us from all that is good, holy and light. We are told, in the preceding verse (5:19), that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."

It's shocking to think that you and I can represent Almighty God in this world, yet this is the reality. After reconciling with those who come to him by faith, he sends us forth as messengers of his grace and mercy and gives us the ministry of reconciliation!

We are not called to be reservoirs of his grace, but to be conduits of it—pipelines to all peoples in all nations. It is the greatest message of all time. We are blessed by it, personally, and blessed to be chosen to share it with others.

Are you his Ambassador? Are you allowing him to make his appeal through you?

JULY 14

2 Corinthians 6:2-3



MY NEIGHBOR OF MANY YEARS WAS A WONDERFUL, MORALLY UPRIGHT MAN, A GOOD NEIGHBOR, AND AN ACTIVE CITIZEN IN OUR COMMUNITY. I ALWAYS REFERRED TO HIM AS “THE MAYOR OF 49TH STREET.”

Jack was a wonderful neighbor and friend, but he was lost.

His wife was a faithful member of the Baptist church around the corner from our house. His lovely daughters and their families were actively involved in churches in the cities where they resided. He “believed” in God, but in his words he “couldn’t get past” two particular issues in his personal experience.

The first was the tragic death of his godly mother, when he was only six years old. He could not understand why God would take her and leave behind several children who needed her. The other issue was the exposure he had, over the years, while working in business with several “professing” Christians.

I had many gospel conversations with Jack, over three decades, and he would tell me of these “hypocrites” and rationalize that he had higher moral standards than they did. “If that’s what being a Christian is, I don’t want any part of it!” he’d say.

The happy ending to the story is that I had the privilege of leading Jack to Christ in his living room at the age of 87. I was blessed to help baptize him at Second Baptist Church the next week. Jack is in heaven now, and I look forward to seeing him again there for eternity.

How sad that Satan was able to use professing Christians as an obstacle in keeping this man blinded to the gospel for so many years.

May we never be guilty of being such a roadblock to others.

JULY 15

2 Corinthians 8



IN THIS CHAPTER, PAUL WRITES ABOUT THE GENEROUS GIVING OF THE BELIEVERS WHO MADE UP THE CHURCHES OF MACEDONIA.

He talks of how they gave to the work of the Lord. He says it this way, “for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part” (8:2). It is amazing when one reads this passage and realizes that these folks who gave to support Paul’s ministry did not give from an abundance of wealth on their part. They gave from their extreme poverty! This is a concept that many Christians just don’t comprehend, but the Macedonians definitely did.

Their concept of giving showed that they understood the greatest gift of all. Jesus was rich beyond our imagination. He was the eternal Son of God, Creator, and owner of all that exists. Yet as Bill and Gloria Gaither wrote, “He left the splendor of heaven knowing his destiny. ‘Twas the lonely hill of Golgotha, there to lay down his life for me!”

There are well meaning folks who say that they just “can’t afford” to give God what is his. How misguided. The Macedonians knew the secret. What was that? Paul tells us in verse five, “They gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.” They gave themselves first to the Lord! They were no longer their own. They understood they had been bought with a price, and they belonged to him. That puts everything into perspective. “Through his poverty we have been made rich.”

Understanding the great price of our salvation helps us begin to comprehend, not only how much we owe him, but the fact that we should also show that same grace in giving that we see modeled in the life of Christ.

JULY 16

2 Corinthians 11-12



AT SOME POINT IN OUR CHRISTIAN LIVES, WE MUST COME TO GRIPS WITH AN UNPLEASANT TRUTH.

There are some things that you and I cannot handle. In fact, there are many things we will face in life that come from circumstances we cannot control. We must trust our Lord in every aspect of our lives.

That goes against the grain for us, since we are taught from the time we are little ones that we must grow up to be strong. Eventually, however, we must come to understand that there is a limit to our strength, intellect, and abilities. Some situations require help from one greater than ourselves.

George Duffield, Jr. understood this truth and he wrote in his grand old hymn, “Stand Up For Jesus”, “Stand in his strength alone; The arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own.”

For me, the stark reality did not hit me until, at age 54, I was diagnosed with stage four incurable cancer. Suddenly, I was facing a crisis that I couldn’t control. I knew that I had to trust in a higher power than I.

Paul understood the concept. He had come to a point where he felt that the only thing he could boast in was his own weakness. When he prayed repeatedly that God would remove a “thorn from his flesh,” God’s answer was shocking, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” To that, Paul declared, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

When we face circumstances beyond our control, may we, like the apostle, learn to stand on the promises of Isaiah 41:10, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

JULY 17

Galatians 1:1-9



HAVE YOU EVER FALLEN FOR SOMETHING? SOMETHING THAT SOUNDED TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE, BUT THAT YOU HOPED REALLY WAS?

How easy it sometimes is for us to fall prey to something that seems so enticing – even spiritually!

Sadly, many who claim the name of Christian have “fallen for a different gospel,” but one that is not the true gospel at all. You hear, “God will bless you if you follow after me!” Or “God loves you and wants you to be whole!” While there is truth in such statements, they certainly aren’t the whole truth.

After Paul greets his readers he jumps right in with, “I’m just stunned! I can’t believe you’re turning away from God so quickly!” Perhaps his intent was to shock them and wake them up to the truth that they had been slipping away. How easy it is to become comfortable and complacent. I fear that, in general, the Church in America is in the same situation. We have lost the sense of urgency to share our faith. We relegate Jesus to Sundays rather than to our entire week. We have fallen prey to “false gospels.”

Paul says elsewhere to “test all things” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). We need to examine what gospel we are following to be sure it’s the true gospel of Jesus Christ, not simply what we want to hear. We can’t pick and choose the good parts and ignore what we don’t like. Yes, we are promised blessings we can’t even imagine! But we are also told that following Christ won’t be a walk in the park!

Let us be sure we are not adhering to a different, false gospel. As we read the Bible daily, we will discover what is true.

JULY 18

Galatians 1:10



THERE ARE SO MANY ONLINE QUIZZES THESE DAYS TO FIND OUT WHAT OTHERS THINK OF YOU. REALLY?! BUT DEEP-DOWN (OR MAYBE NOT SO DEEP-DOWN!) WE ARE ALL CONCERNED TO SOME DEGREE WITH WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK OF US.

We see in these verses, though, that the apostle Paul did not worry about that. He didn't really care. He was more concerned with receiving approval from God than from other people. And it was very freeing for him!

As the saying goes, "You can please some of the people all of the time, you can please all of the people some of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time." So if it's impossible to please everyone, why do we try so hard? In fact, why are we trying to please other people at all?

We should have the same attitude as Paul who basically says, "Do you think I care about the approval of men or about the approval of God? Am I on a mission to please people or the Lord." If our primary concern is pleasing Jesus in our thoughts, our words, and our actions, wouldn't our stress levels decrease? Wouldn't our witness be more effective? Wouldn't we turn the world upside down as the early church did (see Acts 17:6)? May God help us be more concerned with his opinion of us than we are of the opinions of others.

JULY 19

Galatians 1:11-24



ONE OF THE GREATEST STORIES IN THE BIBLE IS THE COMPLETE AND UTTER TRANSFORMATION OF SAUL TO PAUL.

I think we take it for granted now, having heard the story so often, that we fail to grasp what a miraculous event it was.

While the story reminds us of the amazing power of God, it also serves to encourage me when I think that someone is beyond hope. For surely no one was as far from knowing Christ as Savior as Saul was! He was not just against Jesus; he was going after his followers with a vengeance! His intent was to destroy the church. But God took this enemy of his and transformed him to become one of his most faithful servants.

In these verses Paul relates a bit of his personal history and shares how God revealed his truths to him. How amazing! Paul would have been last on any list of potential evangelists in the early church. After all, he had actively sought to destroy it! But God saw something in Paul, something he could use to demonstrate his amazing power to change.

There are probably people that you think are “too far gone” or beyond hope. I know I can think of some! But God is the same today as he was twenty centuries ago! He can still reveal himself and work to bring others to him. We need to be faithful in our praying for these “lost causes” and strive to show and share the love of Jesus.

JULY 20

Galatians 2:1-10



WE OFTEN THINK OF THE EARLY CHURCH AS AN IDYLIC INSTITUTION IN WHICH EVERYONE LIVED IN PEACE AND HARMONY.

To a certain degree, this was true, but as the church grew and became more widespread, there were some problems that arose.

One of the primary issues that Paul tackled in some of his writings was the conflict that came from Jewish believers who felt that Gentile converts needed to adhere to their system of laws. Paul disagreed! He knew that to do so was to become enslaved all over again (2:4).

So Paul presented his case before the church leaders using Titus as a test case. Titus was a Gentile convert and thus was uncircumcised. Paul presented to the church leaders the gospel that he had been proclaiming to the Gentiles. I can imagine the concern in Titus' mind as he awaited their vote: Would he need to subject himself to circumcision to be a true follower of Christ? Might he be the cause of a split in this fledgling church?

The leaders of the church acknowledged Paul's work among the Gentiles, and Titus was not compelled to be circumcised. In fact, they all recognized the value of dividing the work! Paul and Barnabas would continue to minister to Gentile peoples while James and Peter and John would focus on reaching their fellow Jews.

This provides us with a good example for dealing with conflict. All too often we rush to post on social media things to support our side of a matter without stopping to examine the other side. We seem to care more about being "right" and gaining support than we do about discovering the truth and doing what's right for all. When faced with a conflict, may God guide us and help us follow Paul's example.

JULY 21

Galatians 2:11-21



Poor Peter! We know about his many foibles during his time with Jesus.

We know how he denied Jesus the night before the crucifixion, but we also know that once the Holy Spirit came in Acts 2, Peter was the most outspoken proclaimer of the gospel!

We remember how God made it clear to him in Acts 10 that salvation was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews, but somehow that conviction had been fading so that Peter was now separating himself from Gentiles. The fact is, he caved under pressure from some of his Jewish friends (Acts 10:12).

While we are often quick to judge poor Peter, I find that I am a great deal like him. Often our convictions are strong when we're surrounded by like-minded people, but it's not always easy to stand up for those beliefs when among those who may not share them. May God help us to stand firm in our convictions (see 1 Thessalonians 2:15) no matter where we are.

The flip side of this, is recognizing when a brother or sister is wavering or even compromising in matters of faith. Paul certainly saw the error of Peter's ways in this matter and was quick to remonstrate. As he pointed out, Peter was even leading others astray! We also have a responsibility to help and encourage one another in our faith walk. When we see someone whose convictions are beginning to slip, we need to ask God for wisdom and then go alongside that person to bring them in line with God's teaching.

May God grant us grace to stay strong in our faith and to help others when they are weak.

JULY 22

Galatians 2:20



IN HIS ATTEMPT TO CORRECT PETER'S HYPOCRISY (2:13), PAUL MAKES AN ASTOUNDING STATEMENT; THAT HE HAD BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST.

Obviously that's not to be taken literally; he was still alive! There was no need for him to die, because Jesus had already made that sacrifice for him (and for us!).

I think Paul is painting for us a vivid picture of what our lives should be like. We are to die to self and live for Christ. We all know this. Putting it into practice, making it real in our lives, well, that's another matter entirely!

Dying to self means putting aside my own agenda and following God's. It means not being concerned about what other people think, but wanting only to please him. It means letting the Spirit of Christ live in us and through us every moment of every day. This is way easier said than done!

I once heard a Christian teacher who said that many American believers are "practical atheists;" that although we profess to follow Christ, we live as if God does not exist. Certainly we pray and read the Bible and go to church, but if we are to be true followers, we are to be "crucified with Christ." We are to live not for our own selves but for him.

This seems impossible for us! But Paul shares with us his secret: "The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God." We can't do it on our own, no matter how much willpower we have or how great our intentions. We can do it only by faith in Jesus and with his divine assistance.

May he help us strive to do that every day!

JULY 23

Galatians 3:1-25



PAUL HOLDS NOTHING BACK HERE. “YOU FOOLISH GALATIANS!” WHILE HE LOVES THESE PEOPLE, HE IS DEEPLY CONCERNED FOR THEIR SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING.

What could make him call them out like this? They seem to have forgotten they’ve been saved by the grace of God alone and have succumbed to the pressure of living by the law.

We tend to scoff at these Galatian believers. How could they do such a thing?! They’ve experienced mercy and grace, yet they have chained themselves to the impossibility of keeping the law! I wonder if we don’t do something similar.

There are some groups whom we consider to be very legalistic: don’t wear certain clothes, look a certain way, do certain things, don’t do certain things, but I find that I tend to have some of these same attitudes, even though I’d never admit it to you! Perhaps subconsciously we might think, “If I miss church, I won’t receive God’s blessings.” Or “Maybe the reason I’m struggling right now is because I didn’t tithe last month.” While it is of the utmost importance to join with other believers in Bible study and worship and to give to the church, we do not do it because we want to earn God’s favor.

There’s nothing we can do to make God love us less and there’s nothing we can do to make him love us more. All he asks of us is to love him, have faith in him, and obey him. Paul points out that Abraham was made right with God, because he believed God. May we believe him and walk with him, as Abraham did.

JULY 24

Galatians 3:26-4:7



WE HAVE A FLOCK OF CHICKENS. WHILE WE APPRECIATE THE FRESH EGGS, WE ALSO ENJOY WATCHING THE CHICKENS IN THE YARD.

I see there, firsthand, the idea of a “pecking order.” Surprisingly, it is our smallest bantam rooster who is the “alpha male” of the flock.

In the church, however, there is to be no pecking order. No one person or group is superior to the others. Christ is the great equalizer. The 21st century is not all that different from the first. We still make judgments of other people based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, and so on. Paul says there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female (3:28). So it stands to reason that there is no black or white, Asian or American, or rich or poor in the church today. We are all children of God through faith in Jesus.

How do we live this out, though? We know this intellectually, but it’s sometimes hard to put into practice. What would it look like? I think first we would each recognize that we are all former slaves who have been adopted by God into his family. Then we would have a greater appreciation for what he has done for us. We would see that we are all equally blessed to have been saved so graciously. We would understand that each of us came from the same place, but that we are all now brothers and sisters. Can you imagine what that would say to the world?

May we seek to emulate Jesus by welcoming and accepting everyone, especially those within his church.

JULY 25

Galatians 4:8-20



AS I READ THESE VERSES, THERE ARE TWO THINGS IN PARTICULAR THAT STICK OUT TO ME. THE FIRST IS IN VERSE 15: “WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ALL YOUR JOY?” HOW SAD IS THAT? YET, IT SEEMS THAT MANY OF US TODAY HAVE LOST OUR JOY, OUR SENSE OF BEING BLESSED.

When were these Galatians joyful? It seems that when Paul was with them during one of his journeys, he was afflicted in some physical way. Some theorize he had been beaten and left for dead or perhaps he had been afflicted with malaria or some other malady. Whatever the condition was, he was in bad shape. The people there took him in and ministered to him. They did not treat him scornfully, but carefully tended to him. Their service brought them joy! Perhaps this is one of the secrets of finding joy; to be serving God by serving others.

As I look at the faces of people each day, I don’t often see joy. There are a lot of fatigued faces, full of worry or distraction. Sadly, some of these are the faces of fine church-going folks! We should experience joy, even when (or perhaps especially when), we feel weary or concerned or busy.

Our society seems to force us to be busy, but we should examine our busyness to be sure we are about our Father’s business. If we are busy serving him, then we will experience joy. As Nehemiah said, “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). By serving him, through serving others, we can experience and exhibit his joy.

JULY 26

Galatians 4:21-5:15



FREEDOM! I CAN ALMOST HEAR PAUL SHOUTING THIS WORD (LIKE MEL GIBSON IN "BRAVEHEART").

We are free from the law, he reminds his readers here. He illustrates this by using the two sons of Abraham: one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. As the slave woman and her son were to be cast off (Genesis 21:10), so those who are in Christ are to no longer be enslaved. Paul asks, "Why would you want to go back to being slaves?!"

Some Gentile believers in Galatia were in danger of succumbing to the pressure from others to submit to the practice of circumcision. While Paul says that this act in and of itself is not important (5:6), the heart of the matter is that they would no longer be relying on God's grace to save them (5:4). The only thing that counts is faith working through love, he reminds them.

Paul says they had started out their Christian walk strongly, comparing it to a race. Along the way, though, someone had cut them off and diverted them along a different course. He encourages them to get back on track and live the life of freedom they had once experienced.

So how does this relate to us? Circumcision as a religious practice means nothing to us, but there are probably other issues that cause us to wander off course. It is usually a subtle thing; one we may not even be aware of. Paul compares it to the way a little yeast works through the dough. It takes time. A relationship, our work, our recreational activities, or even our families may divert our walk. Again, there's nothing wrong with any of these, unless they keep us from what's truly important.

We need to live in the freedom we have in Christ, making sure that freedom leads us to expressing our faith in love.

JULY 27

Galatians 5:16-18



THERE WAS SOME SERIOUS FEUDING GOING ON AMONG THE BELIEVERS IN GALATIA.

In verse 15 Paul says that they had been “biting and devouring each other.” The primary point of contention was the idea that Gentile believers had to be circumcised, but there were undoubtedly other issues as well. How could they possibly heal this great division? Paul says, by living by the Spirit.

Walking by the Spirit of God keeps us from giving in to the worldly, sinful desires we all have: the desire to have more, to be selfish, to be prideful, and so on. Our sinful nature is in complete opposition to the nature of God, so there will always be conflict.

The Greek word used for the Spirit of God is “pneuma” which can mean breath, air, wind, or spirit. When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we are filled with God’s “pneuma.” This tells me that we need his Spirit just as desperately as our bodies need oxygen. I find I am a spiritual asthmatic most of the time, trying to get by on my own power. A body deprived of oxygen does not function very well. If I am not living by the Spirit of God, then I am more likely to give in to the desires of my sinful nature.

When we as the body of Christ aren’t walking with the Spirit filling us, we are going to be “biting and devouring each other!” What kind of message does that send to the world that we are trying to reach for Christ? Let us consciously strive to breathe in God’s precious Holy Spirit each day and walk with him always.

JULY 28

Galatians 5:19-26



IN THESE VERSES, PAUL MAKES A CHART COMPARING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SINFUL NATURE WE ALL HAVE AND THE NATURE OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD THAT WE SHOULD ASPIRE TO HAVE.

The lists are very different! Who would want any part of the first one? Hatred? Fits of rage? Dissensions? The second list is much more appealing: love, joy, peace, patience, and so on.

Exhibiting these good qualities is not always easy, though. To make it even more difficult, we don't have the option of choosing which ones we want to show. This is the "fruit" of the Spirit, not the fruits. It's a package deal. We should have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control leaking out of us all the time! So how do we?

Paul reminds us, that if we belong to Jesus, our sinful natures have been crucified. They should have no power over us – unless we let them. The key is living by the Spirit, allowing him to work in us and through us. We need to keep in step with him as we go through each day.

Sounds good, and we know all this, but how do we do it? It is a conscious decision we make. When we wake up, our first thoughts should include asking God to fill us with his Spirit. Throughout the day, we need to remind ourselves that we are to live by the Spirit. We must ask him to refill us and help us to reflect him to the world around us.

May God fill our hearts with his Spirit so we can produce his fruit.

JULY 29

Galatians 6:1-5



ITEND TO AVOID CONFRONTATION. I DON'T LIKE IT, BUT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN IT IS NECESSARY TO CONFRONT SOMEONE. ONE OF THOSE TIMES IS WHEN THEY OR OTHERS ARE BEING HURT BY THEIR ACTIONS. THIS IS TRUE IN SPIRITUAL AREAS AS WELL AS IN WORLDLY MATTERS.

Paul gives us some directions here for dealing with such situations. When we see a fellow believer, who is going down a wrong path and bringing dishonor to the name of Jesus, it is the responsibility of mature Christians to gently, lovingly restore him.

Throughout Scripture, we are told to help each other, to encourage each other, and to lift up each other. Sadly, we often do the opposite. Perhaps we feel better about ourselves when others are tripped up. It gives us a reason to "boast" in ourselves (6:4) when we are compared to another's downfall. But that's certainly not like Jesus. I've seen written, something to the effect of that the "army of God" is the only army that shoots its injured. We, above all others, should be the first to help someone who has fallen.

We need to have the heart of Christ to help carry the burdens of our brothers and sisters. We need his gentleness and his humility. We are certainly responsible for our own selves, but we also have a responsibility to help each other.

Let us be loving servants of Christ who seek to help those who have wandered, who encourage others who are weak, and who help carry the burdens of fellow believers.

JULY 30

Galatians 6:6-10



SEVERAL YEARS AGO, I RAN MY FIRST MARATHON. I CAN TELL YOU THAT IT WASN'T EASY, BUT I WAS DETERMINED TO COMPLETE IT! I PUT IN A LOT OF MILES DURING A LOT OF LONG, SLOW RUNS, BUT I KEPT THE GOAL IN MIND; TO FINISH A 26.2-MILE RACE.

The Christian life is a marathon race, so we must not get tired. We are in it for the long haul. It's not a sprint race that lasts a very short time, but rather a long distance one that goes for years. It can be all too easy to quit and throw in the towel when it gets hard.

Serving Christ can be tough. People can be mean sometimes. Situations can be messy. Doing what is good and right is not always rewarded the way we think it should be, but we keep running "the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1). We keep our eyes on the prize.

There are many distractions along our race course. It would be so easy to stop and rest a while or to find something else to do instead, but we keep on working.

Paul uses the agricultural imagery here of sowing and reaping. As in running, farming takes a long time. It may seem as if the seeds we plant will never sprout, let alone bear fruit, but we are called to be faithful. We keep planting the seeds. We keep doing what is right. We keep sharing our faith. We keep loving others, even when it's hard. We are promised that we will reap a harvest of blessing, if we don't quit.

Let us run our race well.

JULY 31

Galatians 6:11-18



FULL DISCLOSURE HERE: I FEEL I MAY HAVE BEEN A BIT BOASTFUL WHEN MENTIONING HAVING RUN A MARATHON. (I ACTUALLY DID TWO! OOPS! THERE I GO AGAIN!)

I don't think I'm the only one with a boasting problem. In fact, social media seems to have exacerbated this tendency in many of us. We use it to boast about our travels or experiences, about our children, about the amazing meals we prepare or eat out!

Paul had many reasons to boast (see Philippians 3:4-6). Add to those credentials all the churches he had planted and the many people he had won to the Lord, but he writes that he never boasts about anything except for the cross of Jesus. How can he rejoice or boast in an instrument of death?!

He boasts in the cross, because that's what makes us a "new creation" (6:15). He boasts that through it, the world has been crucified to him and he to it. He is no longer bound to the world's system. It no longer has sway over his life. What a freeing concept!

This is true for each of us as well. If we have accepted Jesus as the Savior and Lord of our lives, we are also new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). We can experience the peace and mercy of God (6:16). Can you think of anything better to boast about than that?!

Instead of bragging about what we do or where we go or what we eat, perhaps we need to brag more on Jesus. We can boast about what he has done for us, and experience the grace, peace and mercy he longs to pour into our lives. May we boast in Christ alone.

AUGUST 1

Ephesians 1:4-7



DO YOU REMEMBER BEING IN PE CLASS AND HAVING TWO PEOPLE CHOOSE TEAMS FOR THAT DAY'S GAMES?

No one wanted to be the last one chosen. No one wanted to be left standing there while everyone else was on a team.

The Bible teaches us that, in Christ, we are chosen by God to be one of his people. We don't understand how God's sovereign choice works (and it definitely doesn't come without the personal responsibility we see in Ephesians 2:10), but in his wisdom and foreknowledge, he has chosen us to be his. This begs the question: What has he chosen us for? What does it look like to be one of God's people?

First, we are holy and blameless. We should be different from the world around us. Sin cannot reign in our bodies as Christians. Instead, there ought to be a purity and faultlessness about us. This is part of our calling.

Second, we are adopted. God, in his grace and mercy toward us, has taken us in as his children, when we were utterly hopeless on our own. We were lost and God saved us. He brought us into his family through the saving power of Jesus' blood. This results in glorious praise to him.

Third, we are forgiven. Jesus has redeemed us. Colossians says that "he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (1:13-14). Our biggest need is not food or water or shelter. Our biggest need is to have our broken relationship with God repaired and set right.

As a dearly loved and chosen child of God, praise him and thank him today for your wonderful position in Christ.

AUGUST 2

Ephesians 1:13



WHEN WE ARE MAKING A LARGE PURCHASE, WE WILL USUALLY MAKE A DOWN PAYMENT OR HAVE SOMEONE CO-SIGN WITH US TO GUARANTEE THAT WE ARE PREPARING TO TAKE OWNERSHIP.

Guaranteeing the purchase in this way shows that you are committed to the transaction and that you are taking responsibility to be the new owner.

Did you know God made a down payment on us when he redeemed us in Christ? God placed a “signature” on us, guaranteeing that we are forever his. That guarantee is in the person of the Holy Spirit who lives inside us.

God put his mark on us when we believed, and sealed us with the Holy Spirit. This wonderful act shows us that God is committed to us as his children and that we are secure in Christ. The Bible tells us that if God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8)? We are his! Therefore, we can rest secure and know that our salvation is safe in Christ.

This security is both for this life and the life to come. Eternal life begins now and continues forever. There will be a day when the worries and struggles of this life will be no more. We will see him face to face and know him fully, even as we are fully known (1 Corinthians 13).

Therefore, we should remember and rejoice in the fact that God has placed his seal on us. The Holy Spirit will not leave us. We are secure in him and in our salvation. This liberates us to live our lives in unhindered devotion to him. I am safe, no matter the circumstance or situation. I can confidently follow Jesus, knowing that his Spirit is in me, and I am secure in him.

AUGUST 3

Ephesians 1:16



I PRAY FOR MY KIDS EVERY DAY. IT IS ONE OF MY DEEPEST DESIRES THAT THEY KNOW THE LORD AND THAT THEY FOLLOW AFTER HIM.

We all have people we are burdened for and we wrestle for in prayer. These are usually people who are very close to us. Paul was burdened for the new Christians in the churches he planted. His prayers were powerful and without ceasing. His prayers give us insight into the things that God desires for his people.

First, Paul prays that the Ephesian will have a spirit of wisdom and revelation. This means that the Holy Spirit would work in their hearts and minds to give them insights into God's Word. He desires that they know and love their Lord more each day.

Second, Paul prays that they would have the eyes of their hearts enlightened so that they would better know and understand the hope and the riches that are theirs in Christ. Jesus defeated sin and death, and in doing so, he became King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19). He wanted the Ephesians to know that they share in this victory and the inheritance that goes with it.

Third, Paul prays that the church in Ephesus would know the great power of God at work in us who believe. That power is what gave Jesus the victory spoken of above. That power is what continues to give us the ability to live our lives for Jesus every day. That power is what fills us up and imparts to us gifts of the spirit to love others and minister in this world to his glory.

Are you praying these things for those the Lord has put on your heart? Are you praying them for yourself?

AUGUST 4

Ephesians 2:1-5



I LIKE THE MOVIE "TOMBSTONE." IT TELLS THE STORY OF WYATT EARP AND HIS BROTHERS AND WHAT HAPPENED AS A RESULT OF THE SHOOTOUT AT THE OK CORRAL.

Without spoiling the movie, I can tell you this: Wyatt and his gang shot and killed a lot of bad guys. Not one of those bad guys got up and rode away on a horse after they were dead. When you are dead, you are done.

The Bible teaches that we were dead in our trespasses and sins. This means that because of the fall (Genesis 3) we are born in sin, separated from God, and doomed to judgment. We are not only born in sin, but we are slaves to sin. Our passions and desires tempt us and lead us away from God and into self-focused, destructive disobedience. Like those bad guys in the movie, we are done.

However, this is not the end of the story. God is merciful. God is gracious. God loves us too much to leave us in sin. He wants to save us, and he has made a way for us to be made alive!

Romans 5 and 6 clearly teach that while we were sinners (i.e. dead in sin) Christ died for us. He died the death we deserved. John 3:16 says the same thing. Because of Christ, we do not live as dead men. Instead, we live as people who have been set free.

We have moved from death to life. We are no longer slaves to sin, instead we are slaves to Christ. We are no longer children of wrath, instead we are children of God. As you live the Christian life, rejoice in these things, and never be tempted to forget that by grace you have been saved.

AUGUST 5

Ephesians 2:8-10



THE FIDGET SPINNER AMAZES ME. IT IS AN EXTREMELY SIMPLE MACHINE MADE OF A SMALL AMOUNT OF METAL OR PLASTIC WITH A BALL BEARING THAT ALLOWS IT TO BE ROTATED BETWEEN YOUR FINGERS.

What amazes me is not the machine itself, but the purpose behind the machine. It was created to help children (and adults) focus through their attention deficiencies or nervous energy. Such a simple thing, created with such a significant purpose.

God's creation is the same way. It is purposeful. As the pinnacle of his creation, we were created with utmost love and care, and we were given a purpose. What is that purpose? Ephesians 2:8-10 helps us understand that purpose.

First, we were created to be in a right and loving relationship with God. The work that Jesus did on the cross brought us back to the place that God had always planned for us to be. The Bible says that the greatest command is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. We were made for this, and by God's grace, we are saved and able to live our lives loving the One who created us.

Second, we were created to do good works that glorify God. As image bearers of the one true God, and as new creations in Christ, we are his workmanship, created for good works. Not only that, God has already prepared these good works for us to walk in. They are ready and waiting for us to go and do.

Some of these works are external and active: Does your neighbor need help? Go help him. Some of these works are more internal: Am I being tempted to sin? Don't do it! Instead, go do the good work that God has prepared.

AUGUST 6

Ephesians 2:14-18



PEACE IS SOMETHING WE ALL DESIRE. IN STUDIES, PSYCHOLOGISTS FIND THAT PEACE IS USUALLY A TOP WISH THAT PEOPLE HAVE.

Peace is not easy to come by. If you watch the news, you will see more strife and conflict than you see peace. How do we obtain peace? Where does it come from?

The Bible teaches us that we have a problem. The whole world actually has a problem. After the fall of man, selfishness and sin reigned in the world. Where there was supposed to be love and peace, we see conflict and strife. It is as if there is a wall that has been erected that keeps us from achieving what we deeply desire and need – love and peace.

Ephesians tells us that Jesus has torn down the dividing wall of hostility and that he has reconciled us as one to the Father. Through the cross, Jesus has defeated conflict and strife. Now, we can have both peace with God (Romans 5) and peace with our fellow man (Ephesians 2). We do not need to live at odds with people. We can be brothers and sisters in Christ.

When we consider the effects of this work Jesus has done to bring people together, a couple of truths come to light. One, we are no better, or no worse, than anyone else. We are all in need of God's gracious work in our lives. Two, God wants all peoples to be saved. In Revelation 5 and 7 we see a beautiful picture of a great multitude from all nations, tribes, and languages gathered around the throne worshipping God.

There will be a day when all conflict is gone. And there will be gathered together the most diverse group you've ever seen. And we will all be singing praise to the One who has saved us.

AUGUST 7

Ephesians 3:8-9



LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION! I'VE NEVER BEEN ON A MOVIE SET, BUT I UNDERSTAND SOMETHING LIKE THIS IS SAID BEFORE THE CAMERA STARTS ROLLING.

Once the planning has been completed, and the people are in place, filming begins and the story is told.

God has a plan for the world. There is a story that he is telling, and he desires for that story to unfold and be told, so that the world will know that Jesus is Lord. Much like the process of “lights, camera, action” God has a way of working to call people to action in his great plan. Paul’s description of himself and his ministry, in Ephesians 3, helps us understand that process.

Our part in God’s story begins with grace and humility. Through no goodness of our own, God saves us and makes us a new creation. Paul had previously been a murderer and persecutor of the church. As a result, Paul had a deep humility and great understanding of the grace that had been shown to him. God’s gracious work in our lives is similar.

After God’s grace had its humbling and saving effect on Paul, he realized that God was calling him to be on mission in the world. Paul says that he was called to preach the good news to the Gentiles. God had planned all along that Jews and Gentiles both would hear the gospel and believe. God’s sovereign foreknowledge looked down through time and history, and he saw a multitude from every nation and tribe who would worship him forever.

Have you been humbled by the grace of God in your lives? Have you accepted your part in his plan to share Christ with those who do not yet know? God is working out his eternal purposes, and he is calling you to action.

AUGUST 8

Ephesians 3:14-19



I TRY TO EXERCISE REGULARLY. I DO THIS BECAUSE I HOPE TO BE IN FAIRLY DECENT SHAPE AS MY KIDS GET OLDER AND EVEN AS GRANDKIDS COME ALONG. THERE ARE NO HOPES OF ATHLETIC COMPETITIONS OR FEATS OF SUPER STRENGTH.

Paul says, in Ephesians 3, that he is praying for strength. However, he's not praying for the kind of strength that comes from weight training. He's referring to the kind of strength that comes from being rooted and grounded in love.

One of the characteristics of this strength and power is that it comes from the Holy Spirit. It is unending and unshakeable, because its source is unending and unshakeable. It roots us and grounds. It is like a firm foundation that is built on a rock. Wind and waves will not move it. We are eternally secure in the strength and love of Christ.

Another characteristic is that it is obtained through faith. God doesn't give this to the smartest, or the richest, or the cutest, or the poorest. God gives his strength and love to those who humbly accept Jesus by faith.

Finally, this strength is meant to grow us in the knowledge of Christ, so that we will have power to comprehend the greatness of God and his love for us. It is not meant for outward displays of athletic greatness. It is meant to draw us closer and closer to Jesus, so that we might follow him and glorify him in all that we do.

Are you praying for God's strength to root you and ground you in the love of Christ? Are you praying this same thing for others? God desires that we be strong in him and in the power of his might (Ephesians 6).

AUGUST 9

Ephesians 4:1-6



YOU'VE HEARD THE OLD SAYING, "IF IT LOOKS LIKE A DUCK AND SWIMS LIKE A DUCK AND QUACKS LIKE A DUCK, THEN IT PROBABLY IS A DUCK."

This is a cute way of saying that things can be identified by observing certain characteristics. What characteristics do you display? As Christians, God has called us to live in a certain manner.

The first thing we see about the manner of life God has called us to is that it is Spirit-filled. The character that Paul describes is very much like that in Galatians 5 when he describes the fruit of the Spirit. When a person believes in Jesus, he is sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). As the Holy Spirit lives in and continues to sanctify this person, he begins to walk in the Spirit and bear the fruit of the Spirit. Philippians 2 teaches us that Jesus lived with humility. We are called to these same things; they ought to be displayed in the everyday lives of Christians.

The second thing we see about the manner of life God has called us to is that it is a life of peace and unity with others. Division and hate are easy. We are naturally selfish people. We want what we want, when we want it, and we don't care that much about how it affects others. But among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, there is unity and love. If Christians are truly walking in the Spirit, there will also be unity and love in the church. We will have mutually loving, peaceful relationships with one another, and the watching world will see this and know that we are different.

Are you walking in a manner that is worthy of the calling God has given to his people?

AUGUST 10

Ephesians 4:17-24



OUR MIDDLE CHILD CHANGED CLOTHES A LOT WHEN HE WAS YOUNGER. HE WOULD GO THROUGH FOUR OR FIVE OUTFITS IN A DAY. THIS WAS HORRIBLE FOR OUR LAUNDRY SITUATION, BUT IT IS A GOOD ILLUSTRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

When we believe in Jesus, we are born again to a new life (John 3:3). The old life has passed away, and the new life has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

In order to put on the new self, we must first take off the old self. As Christians, we are people who have been saved and redeemed, however, we still struggle with sin and temptation. We are called to continually work at leaving that life behind. Laying aside the sins which entangle us is an active and constant part of the Christian life (Hebrews 12:1).

We are also called to renew our minds. God wants to change our thinking, so that we will act differently. The Bible teaches us what is true and right, and as we meditate on it, our hearts and minds are transformed. Our will is bent toward God, and we have a better understanding of who he is, and how he desires for us to live (Psalm 119).

Finally, Paul tells us to put on the new self. Having taken off the old self and been renewed in our thinking, we are ready to live the Christian life. Instead of hate, we have love. Instead of talking about things that degrade, we talk about things that build up.

Are you actively working to “take off” the old self and “put on” the new self in your daily life? Do you have a daily time of Bible reading and meditation? Are you praying for God to help you live the new life you have in Christ?

AUGUST 11

Ephesians 5:1-2



AS A KID, MY FRIENDS AND I WOULD TRY TO IMITATE OUR FAVORITE ATHLETES, AND AS YOU CAN IMAGINE, WE FELT WOEFULLY SHORT IN OUR ATTEMPTS AND DREAMS.

It was impossible for a five foot tall kid to dunk like Jordan, or run like Bo Jackson. It would be easy to look at the Christian life and say, “That’s impossible. There’s no way I can live a life that tells me to imitate Jesus!”

While the Christian life is demanding (take up your cross daily), it is not impossible. God has given us his Spirit and his Word. He has promised that the good work he began in us, he will also bring it to completion (Philippians 1:6). What does it look like for a Christian to be “complete” in Christ, able to live as an imitator of God?

That word “completion” in Philippians 1 comes from the same word (telos) in Matthew 5:48, where Jesus tells his disciples to be “perfect” as the heavenly Father is perfect. Sinlessness is not being prescribed here. Instead, the teaching of Jesus says that we must strive for perfection and maturity in our faith. Paul was driven to teach and disciple others so that they would be mature in Christ (Colossians 1:28).

This teaching does not deny that we are saved by faith. Instead, it takes seriously the words of Jesus and other New Testament writers who call God’s people to holiness (1 Peter 1:15). The teaching of Jesus is a stumbling block to the man who desires easy street Christianity. We are called to live like Jesus lived, and we are promised that in the end, God will bring us to maturity in our faith. Let this encourage you to continue taking up your cross daily to follow Jesus and live like him.

AUGUST 12

Ephesians 5:22-26



MARRIAGE IS A MYSTERY. I'M NOT MERELY TALKING ABOUT THE "MEN ARE FROM MARS, WOMEN ARE FROM VENUS" MYSTERY.

It is certainly true that men and women are different and that there are times when it seems almost impossible to mutually understand one another. The true mystery (and beauty) of marriage is found in the relationship of husband and wife, and how that relationship reflects the relationship between Jesus and his bride (the church).

In the beginning, God created man and woman. This relationship was created to show us the love of God toward his people, and how he would humbly come to serve and save them.

When a wife submits to her husband, she is simply doing what Jesus did. He submitted to the will of the Father and humbly set aside his glory for a time. He was still equal with the Father, as a member of the Godhead, but he knew that in order to accomplish the eternal plan of God he would need to submit and take the role given to the Son.

When a husband loves his wife, he is also doing what Jesus did. The greatest act of love in the history of mankind took place at the cross when Jesus died for the sins of the world. He willingly laid down his life for others. He did not seek his own good or glory at that moment. Instead, he sought to serve those he came to save.

If you are married, do you realize that your marriage is intended to show the beauty of God and how he relates to his people? As we grow in our understanding of how Jesus humbly and lovingly came to serve and save his people, we are better able to embrace our roles as husbands and wives.

AUGUST 13

Ephesians 6:4



THERE ARE MANY GREAT THINGS THAT PEOPLE HAVE DONE THROUGHOUT HUMAN HISTORY.

That a team of people could get men to the moon is an amazing accomplishment. The daily service and sacrifice of first responders, law enforcement and military personnel, also point us toward professions that are honorable and important. However, I do not believe there is a more honorable or important responsibility that can be given to someone than that of dad.

More than anyone else, dads have the ability to make or break a family. Steady, godly leadership can move children toward a similarly steady, godly life. Notice the promise that goes with Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.” We can have eternal impact for good in the lives of our children.

No doubt, moms have an invaluable place in the lives of children. Pastors, teachers, aunts and uncles are all important. But dad is the one who is given the command to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Consider the questions below, as you meditate on and pray through today’s Scripture reading:

Are you growing in your own relationship with God? Do you have a set time each day to pray and read God’s word? You will teach your kids out of the overflow of your own life.

Are you teaching the Bible to your kids? We need to teach our kids the truth of the Bible and help them understand the blessings of obedience and the pitfalls of disobedience.

If you are struggling to find time for family Bible study and worship, why? What is more important than training up a child in the way he should go, and then seeing him walk faithfully with the Lord?

AUGUST 14

Ephesians 6:10-17



I'VE NEVER SERVED IN THE MILITARY, AND I'VE NEVER BEEN IN A MILITARY CONFLICT. HOWEVER, MY GRANDDAD SERVED IN WORLD WAR II, AND I HAVE SEEN FIRSTHAND THE EFFECTS OF WAR.

It is traumatic and can wreak havoc on a person for many years to come. While, I've never been in a military conflict, I have been in a war. Actually, all of us have. We are in a spiritual battle that is raging around us for souls. How do we stand firm in this battle? How do we win?

The first thing to understand in this battle is that it is not against flesh and blood. Your enemy is the devil. He hates you and wants you to walk away from God and from the truth. We see this in the garden with Adam and Eve. He would not stop until he had ruined their relationship with God.

The good news is that God has provided all we need to stand and be victorious in this battle. Jesus has defeated sin and death. He has canceled the legal debt that kept you from God, and he has disarmed the spiritual forces that would keep you captive to sin (Colossians 2:14-15). When we clothe ourselves in his truth, we are kept safe. When we exercise faith in the battle, and when we hide God's word in our hearts, we are given protection and power to live the Christian life courageously. When we pray and join God's mission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, we engage in a victory march that will not end until all nations are represented in heaven worshipping the King of kings.

Are you fighting the good fight? Are you standing firm in the gospel, with the all-powerful help of Jesus?

AUGUST 15

Ephesians 6:18-20



PECAN PIE IS ONE OF THE THINGS I LOOK MOST FORWARD TO HAVING AT THANKSGIVING.

Actually, I struggle to control myself when there is pecan pie on the table. It is not easy to be disciplined. Our flesh wants to do what it wants to do.

Prayer is a discipline and a practice. It is something we must be intentional about. Praying is something most Christians say they should do more often. Ephesians 6 admonishes us to pray, and gives us a number of reasons why prayer should take priority in the Christians life.

- Prayer is one of the defenses we have in the spiritual battle.
- Prayer helps us commune with God.
- Prayer helps others in the battle (not just ourselves).
- Prayer helps move the gospel forward in the mission of God.
- Prayer gives us boldness and courage in the battle.

This passage also tells us to “pray at all times” and to “keep alert in all perseverance.” Prayer is something to take serious and to do continually. It is not enough to just pray before meals and at bed-time. It is not enough to pray and thank God for all the stuff he gives us. Our prayers need to come with consistency and urgency. The Bible tells us that lives are at stake in this spiritual battle. Real people die and go to a real hell when they don’t hear the gospel and believe in Jesus. On the other hand, we have an opportunity to see people saved out of this battle. Real people can have a real relationship with the one true God, and they can spend eternity with him.

Let’s commit to real prayer that engages the spiritual battle and makes a difference in the eternal destiny of real people that you see every day.

AUGUST 16

Philippians 1:3-11



THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS WAS WRITTEN BY THE APOSTLE PAUL. HE WROTE THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN PHILIPPI, SPECIFICALLY ABOUT PRACTICAL WAYS THEY COULD LIVE OUT THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THEIR WORLD.

Paul had a desire to encourage them to continue walking daily in faith and live as citizens of heaven. In today's verses, Paul prayed a very specific prayer of thanks, encouragement, and challenge for the Philippians, to live out the love God had for them daily. Today, I would like to offer a similar prayer for West Virginia.

God, we thank you for the majestic mountains, flowing rivers, fertile valleys, and the people of West Virginia. God, we thank you for the many who are hardworking, loyal, courageous, honest, and faithful. God, would you grant your people wisdom, strength, courage, and love this day, wisdom for the many choices to be made, strength for the busyness of the days and weeks ahead, courage to stand up for what is right, and love for our neighbors? God, would you also help us to love you more and more with each day that passes. Help us to live out your love, that it would shine through all the Christians in West Virginia, that we may be an example of the love that you have for all people! We pray that everything we do would bring honor and glory to your name. In Jesus' name, amen.

AUGUST 17

Philippians 1:12-26



ACCORDING TO MERRIAM-WEBSTER, JOY IS “THE EMOTION EVOKED BY WELL-BEING, SUCCESS, OR GOOD FORTUNE, A STATE OF HAPPINESS OR FELICITY, OR A SOURCE OR CAUSE OF DELIGHT.” PAUL GIVES FOUR REASONS HE FOUND JOY IN LIFE.

First, Paul was joyful in difficult circumstances when God’s plan was advanced. If anyone ever had a reason to complain about their circumstances in life, Paul would be at or near the top of the list. He moved from place to place, was snake-bitten, shipwrecked, imprisoned, stoned, and faced certain death on multiple accounts. However, despite his circumstances, he found joy in all of it, because God’s plan for his life was being carried out.

Second, he was joyful when people spoke badly of him, as long as others heard about Jesus. I’m sure Paul would have preferred that all people heard, listened, and lived out the message of Jesus he was teaching. Instead of being angry, bitter, or talking back, he chose to have joy because more and more people had the opportunity to hear about Jesus.

Third, he was joyful when he faced death, as long as the good news about Jesus was being preached. Paul valued his life. However, he valued living for Jesus more!

Finally, he was joyful when he longed to go to heaven as long as the purpose of the church was being advanced. At this point, Paul had faithfully served God for years and had a desire to go be with him. Yet, Paul understood it was not his time to leave for heaven so he found joy in advancing God’s kingdom through the local church.

AUGUST 18

Philippians 2:1-4



PAUL IS CONCERNED SPECIFICALLY WITH BELIEVERS IN THE CHURCH CAUSING DIVISION OVER INTERPRETATIONS, STANDARDS, INTERESTS, AND PREFERENCES THAT ARE LARGELY MATTERS OF PERSONAL CHOICE.

Fortunately, we do not have these issues in the church today, right? Of course we do. Too many times we, as Christians, allow our personal opinions to trump the Word of God. Paul speaks against Christians insisting on their own way because it is sinful and divides the body of Christ. For believers to humbly defer to one another on secondary issues is a mark of spiritual strength, not weakness (Romans 14:1-15:7).

Paul lists four if/then statements. John MacArthur suggests that a better word than “then” usage in modern day English would be, “because”, “since”, or “so”, in order for us to better understand the meaning. First, believers should be unified because there is encouragement in Christ. Second, believers should be unified because of the comfort that comes from those who closely love one another. Third, believers should be unified because all believers have the Holy Spirit as a helper. Finally, believers should be unified because Jesus demonstrated both affection and sympathy.

There are so many things in our world that divide us. The Church cannot afford for believers to be divided about secondary issues. As believers, we must choose to unify because we come alongside each other and show love and compassion, because of the comfort we receive from believers who walk beside us through difficult situations, because the Holy Spirit helps us follow after God, and because Jesus is our perfect example of how to love others!

AUGUST 19

Philippians 2:5-11



ATTITUDE IS A WORD THAT OFTEN IS USED IN A NEGATIVE MANNER.

I remember, as a kid, my mom saying, “You better straighten up or I’ll give you an attitude adjustment.” Being the oldest child, I knew most of the time she was talking to my two younger sisters. What did my mom mean by that statement? The three of us certainly knew what mom meant. She was going to change the way we acted in a given situation even if it took her loving discipline to force the change.

In Philippians 2:5 we find Paul saying, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” Paul is reminding and encouraging the church at Philippi to take on the same type of attitude Jesus had. Now, Paul was not going to get out a wooden spoon or yardstick. However, he used his words; almost in a pleading manner. Paul did so, because he was stressing the extreme importance of the need for believers to be humble, just as Jesus was, so that they would experience true unity within the church.

What attitude did and does Jesus have? Jesus is the Son of God and the Alpha and the Omega. Yet, out of love for all people, he humbled himself and was born as a human. He had a family and faced difficult life circumstances. He endured controversy and was tempted but did not sin. The attitude Jesus lived out for us is that the needs of others are more important than our own needs, and God’s plan is always more important than our plan. Let’s have that same attitude.

AUGUST 20

Philippians 2:12-13



IAM VERY FORTUNATE TO HAVE BEEN RAISED BY A MOM AND DAD WHO NOT ONLY LOVE GOD, BUT ALSO LOVE ME UNCONDITIONALLY.

Even before I was born, my parents had a deep desire to raise me to love God and love others. They were intentional and began to mold me into the man they someday hoped I would become. Looking back upon my life, I can see several ways they instilled these values. They set a good example and lived out these values in front of me. They made sure I understood I was unconditionally loved and that I understood obedience. And they taught me to take responsibility for my actions and helped me understand there were consequences to my actions. Good actions led to positive consequences, and bad or sinful actions led to negative consequences.

Why did my parents make so many sacrifices to teach me these lessons? They did it out of love and a desire for me to succeed in life. Just like my parents helped mold me into who they wanted me to be, God molds believers in a similar way. God gave us Jesus as the perfect example and loves us unconditionally. God helps us understand the need for obedience to him. And God helps us learn to take responsibility for our actions and proves to us there are consequences to sin. God's power and presence empower us to live out his purpose for us.

AUGUST 21

Philippians 3:12-14



HOW DOES A BELIEVER OVERFLOW WITH GOD'S LOVE AND MAINTAIN THE HUMBLE ATTITUDE OF JESUS IN DAY-TO-DAY LIVING?

Paul challenges us, as believers, to “press on toward the goal of knowing Christ,” while acknowledging that he had not yet achieved this goal. Paul understood that the Christian life does not end by giving one's life to Christ; rather that the salvation experience is just the beginning of the Christian life. Paul refers to life as a race. Life is not a 200 meter dash; it's a marathon that lasts a lifetime.

What motivates us to press on toward the goal of knowing Christ? Our relationship with Jesus and desire to become more like him should be our motivation for all we do. Jesus first loved us by laying down his life for us. Because he loves us, we follow after him, we don't quit, and we strive to know him more. Paul emphasizes forgetting what was behind and focusing on what was in front of him. A runner is not guaranteed success today because he won yesterday. Likewise, any runner who looks behind him runs the risk of making a mistake or being passed. It is vital that we make the most of every moment and follow after Christ with all that we are today, so that we can build upon that momentum tomorrow. Don't live in the past. Don't give up. Press on. Push forward. Follow after.

Overflow, and live today for Jesus!

AUGUST 22

Philippians 4 (Part 1)



THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS WAS WRITTEN NEAR THE END OF PAUL'S LIFE. MOST LIKELY, THIS WAS THE LAST LETTER PAUL WOULD HAVE WRITTEN TO THE CHURCH AT PHILIPPI.

He concludes his letter to them here in Chapter 4 with a few last pieces of wisdom. First, Paul challenged the Philippians to stand firm in the Lord. Remain obedient to the things that build, deepen, and strengthen our relationship with God. We must make time to read the Bible, pray, fellowship with other believers, and live out the love God has for us to all the world.

Second, Paul challenged the Philippians to settle their disagreements. He specifically addressed Euodia and Syntyche because they were in the middle of some disagreement. There are no details given, but it was serious enough for Paul to address it in his letter. Just like Euodia and Syntyche, we will all face disagreements with other believers. The disagreements may be over important theological issues, who is in charge of certain areas, or what color is the new carpet going to be. It really doesn't matter what the argument is over. In disagreements, emotions tend to run high, and friendships can be destroyed. When we find ourselves in disagreement with believers, we should remember we are on the same team, that we all belong to God.

AUGUST 23

Philippians 4 (Part 2)



PAUL'S THIRD CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH AT PHILIPPI WAS TO REJOICE ALWAYS. IT'S IMPORTANT FOR US TO REMEMBER THAT PAUL MOST LIKELY WROTE THIS LETTER FROM A ROMAN PRISON.

Even in the midst of difficult circumstances, Paul experienced true joy. There is a difference between happiness and having joy. Happiness can quickly disappear because it is based on our moods and circumstances. Joy can last much longer because it is based on a decision to remember all the reasons we have to be joyful, even in spite of difficult circumstances. God has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. He loves us and desires a relationship with us.

Fourth, Paul challenged the Philippians not to worry. We all experience worry, anxiousness, and stress. When those moments come, we can experience peace by telling God about our struggles, thank him for our blessings, and trust in him.

Finally, Paul challenged the Philippians to fix their thoughts on what is true. Verse 8 provides a good filter for the things we should allow into our lives. We are constantly bombarded with words, ideas, and images. What do we give our attention to and what do we ignore? Paul says, "whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable."

These challenges still apply to us today. Stand firm in the Lord. Rejoice always. Keep focused on what is true.

AUGUST 24

Colossians 1:15-20



BEGINNING IN VERSE 15, PAUL GIVES A CLEAR DESCRIPTION OF WHO JESUS IS. SPOILER ALERT: JESUS WAS GOD. PAUL SAYS THAT IN SIX DIFFERENT WAYS.

“He is the image of the invisible God” (1:15). He was an image, an icon, of God but different from the way we’re made in the image of God. We were made to resemble God, but Jesus is the exact representation of God. Jesus in one third of the Trinity.

“...The firstborn over all creation” (1:15). All of creation was made by him and for him. He is in the first position of inheritance.

“And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (1:17). He is the center, like the sun. It’s all about him. He was there at the beginning, and he will be there victorious at the end.

“And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (1:18). As the head of the body, he is the source of new life. The closer we are to him, the more his life flows in us.

“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (1:19). Paul’s point here is that as Christ dwells in you, the fullness of God dwells in you.

“And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (1:20). And lastly, but the greatest news of all: We were the sinners, but he was the one who paid. He came after us and rescued us. He paid the debt for our sins in our place. He did it so “that in everything he might be preeminent” (1:18).

AUGUST 25

Colossians 2:1-8



PAUL HAD A DEEP LOVE FOR THE CHURCH BECAUSE OF THE DEEP LOVE JESUS HAD FOR THE CHURCH.

Paul was committed to serving the Church. Like any good parent has for their children, Paul had goals for the church in Colossae. Paul desired for these believers to have a strong heart, to be unified in love, to have full assurance in Christ, to daily walk with Jesus, and to overflow with thanksgiving.

A strong heart truly comes when a believer is filled with the Holy Spirit. We should be careful to guard our hearts and feed our minds a diet of healthy spiritual things. What goes in will come out. We must fill our hearts and minds with biblical truths if we want a strong heart.

Being unified in love means believers come together for a common goal and purpose. This means laying aside our personal preferences and opinions to join together with other believers.

Paul urged the Colossians to live daily knowing that Jesus was God and to truly understand Jesus was all they needed. Having a full assurance in Christ comes when believers live out these spiritual truths.

Paul also challenged them to daily walk with Jesus. God has and continues to provide for our needs and beyond. Because of all God has done for us, we should gladly overflow with thanksgiving to him.

AUGUST 26

Colossians 3:1-4



WHEN I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL, A TEACHER ASSIGNED ME TO READ AND WRITE A BOOK REPORT ON FIVE BOOKS WRITTEN BY JOHN STEINBECK.

As a senior, my mind was in so many other places. I was focused on the golf team, national honor society, SAT scores, college applications, and work. I also struggled in reading comprehension when it was not a something that particularly interested me. I can remember sharing this assignment and my struggle with my mom. She chose to sit down with me and listen as I read. She engaged me with questions about what we read, and with her help, I finished my project with an A+. What was the key to my success with this project? The key was focus. My focus was all over the place until my mother helped me put those distractions aside and focus on the task at hand.

Paul challenged the Christians in Colossae to set, or focus, their minds on heavenly things instead of earthly things. You see slogans in our world such as “YOLO” (You Only Live Once) or hear someone who says “I’m looking out for number one.” The world we live in teaches us to live our lives the way we want, when we want, and with no regard for others. The Bible teaches a very different way of living: Love God more than anything else and love others as yourself (Mark 12:30-31). Paul taught that we should live in such a way that we view people, things, and activities through a heavenly lens. We should see as God sees. How’s your vision today?

AUGUST 27

Colossians 3:5-9



WE WANT THINGS TO LOOK PRESENTABLE AND FOR ALL THE STUFF THAT DOESN'T BELONG OUT IN THE OPEN TO NO LONGER VISIBLE.

"Clean up your room!" These were words I heard often as a child and repeat now to my own children.

Paul taught a similar principle when he told the Colossians to "put them all away." Now Paul wasn't talking about putting clothes in the dresser, toys in their bins, and books on a bookshelf. He was talking about sinful actions in our lives. Remember, Paul was writing to believers. For my sisters and me, "you must put them all away," was not a suggestion or something to be done if we felt like it. That statement meant do it, and do it now or there will be major consequences. Paul's statement was very similar to my mom's. It wasn't a suggestion or an "if you feel like it" statement. He meant do it, and do it now.

Unlike the items in my bedroom, Paul didn't say for these actions to be put away and brought out later. Rather, his statement is to "put them away and put them to death."

AUGUST 28

Colossians 3:9-14



YESTERDAY, WE DISCUSSED “PUT THEM ALL AWAY,” SO THAT THINGS LIKE ANGER, WRATH, MALICE, SLANDER, AND OBSCENE TALK WOULD NO LONGER BE VISIBLE IN OUR LIVES (COL. 3:8).

Today, we are going to look at “put on.” I began to ponder what I was told to “put on” as a child.

My parents would remind me: put on socks with your shoes, put on clean underwear, put on deodorant, put on a nice shirt, put on pants without holes in the knees. These stick out in my mind because all of these were important instructions for me to follow as a little boy, and they’re still important to this day. My mom and dad told me to put these items on, either to enhance who I was or to protect me from potential danger. It’s important to wear deodorant if a 13-year-old boy desires to have any friends. Or if I wore shoes without socks, I would get a blister on my foot.

Paul told the believers in Colossae to “put on” compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and love.

AUGUST 29

Colossians 3:14-17



AFTER THE PAST TWO DAYS OF EVERYTHING WE SHOULD PUT AWAY AND PUT ON, PAUL SAID, ABOVE ALL, WE SHOULD PUT ON LOVE.

Why love? Love is where it all starts. Every good action of a believer is rooted in love. In John MacArthur's commentary on Colossians he said, "Love is the beauty of the believer, dispelling the ugly sins of the flesh that destroy unity." Love is the most important quality in a believer's life because love is what creates unity in a body of believers.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (1:16). God's Word should be in our heart, our mind, and on our lips daily. It is vital that believers not only hear God's Word, but read, meditate, and live out God's Word. What goes in will come out. If we want to know God's Word and live it out, we first have to take it in and absorb it.

"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (1:17). Have I done everything today as if I was doing it for the Lord?

AUGUST 30

Colossians 4:2-4



TRI-ATHLETES ARE AMAZING. THEY SWIM, BIKE, AND RUN FOR MILE AFTER MILE, AND THEY KEEP ON GOING IN SPITE OF THEIR FATIGUE.

As Christians, we are called to endure and continue steadfastly in prayer. If we will persevere in constant prayer, training ourselves to be diligent, we will see God work in our lives and in the lives of the people around us.

How does Paul call the Colossian church to continue in steadfast prayer? What should be our attitude as we pray this way? Paul tells the church to pray with vigilance, to pray with thanksgiving, and to pray with purpose.

Vigilance is part of the Christian's prayer life. This is the watchfulness that Paul's speaks of. The follower of Jesus is asking and seeking and knocking. He is aware of what's going on around him, and he seeks God's help and guidance. He knows that temptation is just around the corner, and he is careful to avoid it.

Thanksgiving is also part of the Christian's prayer life. God calls his people to live for him, and not for themselves. The temptation though, is to live selfishly. The motive for prayer can be to get as much as one can for one's self (James 4:1). However, the thankful man will live with gratitude for what God has blessed him with, and he will ask correctly in prayer for the things that please God.

Finally, the Christian is called to pray with purpose. Paul asks the church to pray for doors to be open so that the gospel may move forward and impact a lost world. He doesn't ask them to merely pray, he asks them to pray strategically.

Let us challenge ourselves to pray with steadfast endurance in a way that pleases God and impacts the world around us.

AUGUST 31

Colossians 4:6



STICKS AND STONES MAY BREAK MY BONES BUT WORDS WILL NEVER HURT ME.

I believe I recited those words quite a few times as a child. But like you, I learned that those words are not true. Words do hurt. Check out these lyrics from Hawk Nelson's song Words:

"They've made me feel like a prisoner. They've made me feel set free. They've made me feel like a criminal. Made me feel like a king. They've lifted my heart. To places I'd never been. And they've dragged me down. Back to where I began. Words can build you up. Words can break you down. Start a fire in your heart or, put it out. Let my words be life. Let my words be truth. I don't wanna say a word, unless it points the world back to You."

Those are powerful words from a great song. We all have days where we didn't sleep well or someone creates drama. Days when have too much to do and not enough time to do it. Bad days. So, how do we respond to others when our day is filled with one or even many inconveniences? Paul said, "Let your speech always be gracious." Always? 100% of the time? That seems impossible, right? Like the song Words says, let my words be life, let my words be truth.

God help me to honor you today with my words so that they would be compassionate, encouraging, purposeful, and point the world to Jesus! In Jesus' name, amen.

SEPTEMBER 1

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3



THE WORDS “ALWAYS” AND “CONSTANTLY” SHOW UP QUITE A FEW TIMES THROUGHOUT 1 THESSALONIANS FROM VERSE TWO ALL THE WAY TO ONE OF THE LAST VERSES.

What is something you are constantly doing? What’s something that is always a part of your day?

I have to be the first to admit that giving thanks isn’t at the top of my list of things I’m always doing. Instead, I’m constantly working, constantly checking my phone and social media, constantly worrying about how I’m going to pay the bills, constantly worrying about my kids.

Paul makes it pretty clear, in many of his letters, that giving thanks is one of the most important things to “always” be doing. Not in an annoying, better-than-everyone, reality denying way. It’s an attitude - an attitude that sets the tone for how you react to life.

Is this kind of attitude even possible? Everyday, even every week, doesn’t come with a lot of things to be grateful for. But, then, I noticed something interesting in how Paul went out of his way to be thankful - for the church in Thessalonica and others: he was thankful for the people. All of the people he encountered on his journeys. Not just some of the people, but all of them. I’m sure some of them pushed his buttons or sucked a lot of energy from him - those “extra grace required” people - yet he was still grateful.

I can be thankful because it reminds me that my Father uses all things and all people in my life to transform me more into his child and uses it for my good.

SEPTEMBER 2

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12



IN THE HURRY OF LIFE, WE FORGET THAT WE ARE CALLED TO MAKE DISCIPLES (SHARE THE GOSPEL) AS WE DO LIFE (SHARE OUR OWN SELVES).

We have task lists, deadlines, kids to run all over the place. We're burning the candle at both ends. We have to re-calibrated to the heart of God and the urgency to share the gospel message everywhere we are. Take a look around you. See the lostness.

"Our hearts will be more prone to share the gospel with saints and sinners when we are engaged with our context, give of ourselves and our Savior, and grieve everyday over the spiritual condition of others" (D.A. Horton).

Relationship requires risk. Whether they are with the believers or nonbelievers, relationships require a vulnerability and a willingness to share the message (the gospel) and ourselves (our souls). It is worth the risk.

"So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (2:8).

As Christians, John 4:14 tells us, that whoever drinks of the water of eternal life will never be thirsty again. Therefore, it is part of the nature of being a transformed person to give. Part of your identity in Christ should be to give yourself away to others.

Verse 8 in our text shows us how pleasing it was for Paul to not just share the gospel message but his life, his heart. It's inconvenient and hard to share the burdens of others, but the Lord promises it will be joyful.

SEPTEMBER 3

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20



WHAT A BEAUTIFUL WAY TO EXPRESS A LOVE FOR A PEOPLE AND REGION.

“For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?” (2:19).

Paul loved the Thessalonians and shared their burdens deeply. It reminds me of my call to the people of West Virginia.

Here are five ways we can use the depths of Paul’s relationship with the Thessalonians as a framework to intentionally love others:

Weep. A pastor told me a few years ago that “if a church planter doesn’t weep for his city, he has no business being there.” The room gets a little dusty when I recall my call to West Virginia. Jesus had this same love for Jerusalem, Luke 19 says that “as he approached and saw the city, he wept for it” (Luke 19:41).

Listen. The greatest commodity these days is giving people your time. Where are people rejoicing? Where are they hurting? Often we feel like we need to have things to say, especially when people are grieving, but it’s okay to be silent and listen.

Encourage. Paul didn’t just feed lines of encouragement to his friends. He gave his right arm, Timothy, to them for a while. Free up your to-do list so that you are available to encourage in tangible ways and not just empty words.

Share the gospel. Paul was motivated by the day they will stand in the presence of God. Making disciples involves having real relationships you are personally investing in.

Pray. How often do we pray for those around us? Throughout this letter Paul asks how he can pray for them (3:9), says he’s praying for them (3:11), commands them to pray constantly (5:17), and asks for their prayers as well (5:25).

SEPTEMBER 4

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13



PAUL TALKS ABOUT ENCOURAGEMENT AND COMFORT THE SAME WAY JESUS TALKS ABOUT HOW THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS IN US TO COME ALONGSIDE TO ENCOURAGE, COMFORT, AND HELP US.

So, if the Holy Spirit resides in every believer, God uses us in each other's lives encourage and comfort one another.

Here are four ways we can encourage one another:

1. **How's it going?** Timothy had brought a good report (3:6), so they knew what was going on in each others lives. We need to be aware of what's going on in the lives of those around us.
2. **Way to go!** They were quick to give words of encouragement (3:7-8). Paul is cheering them on and is also encouraged himself along the way.
3. **I'm praying for you.** Paul tells them that he's praying for them (3:9-10) and what he's praying for. Don't you know they were encouraged to know Paul was actually praying for them?
4. **Where can I help?** If we really want to come alongside others, we must be ready and willing to serve, help, and invest tangibly.

SEPTEMBER 5

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12



IF YOU ARE A NEW CREATION, IF YOU HAVE PLACED YOUR TRUST AND LIFE IN THE HANDS OF JESUS CHRIST, YOU ARE IN A CONTINUAL PROCESS OF SANCTIFICATION (BECOMING HOLY).

We are never finished growing as God desires holiness from us. God didn't forgive and save you and then move on. "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). So we must continue to allow our faith to transform us - to make us pure, to create practical, everyday holiness in our minds and with our actions.

Time for some self-reflection:

- Am I ready to cooperate with the Holy Spirit with the work that God wants to do in me?
- What fruit of the spirit of Jesus do I see developing in me? (Galatians 5:22-23)
- How am I currently changing? How do others see me changing?

As you give control of your life to God, he will transform you.

SEPTEMBER 6

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18



THERE ARE PLENTY OF THINGS WE CAN TRY TO PUT OUR HOPE IN, BUT THE GREATEST HOPE FOR EVERY CHRISTIAN IS THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST.

One day “the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (4:16–18). Every question will be answered. Every wrong will be righted. And those of us who have been redeemed by grace through faith will be with him for all eternity.

At the same time, we also deal with a lifetime of hardships and disappointments that can cause us to lose all hope. While these adversities are painful, they represent life not going the way we wanted. We expected something better. This is not how we’d planned for things to go. Our reactions reveal where we’ve placed our hope. Does our hope depend on a set of conditions? Or are we truly looking forward to the second coming of Christ more than anything else?

Remember whose you are, and do not put your hope at risk. The God who rules the universe has given you hope to endure any challenge of life, no matter how upsetting, demanding, painful, or impossible.

“I need a real hope about a real place to dispel my fears and discouragement...” (Elyse Fitzpatrick, Home). He is coming soon!

SEPTEMBER 7

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11



WHEN I LOOK TO THE FUTURE, TO THE DAY OF THE LORD'S RETURN, I HAVE TWO CONTRASTING FEELINGS.

The first is peace and hope. Peter says that our inheritance as children of God is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading (1 Peter 1). Our future is protected and nothing will be allowed to happen that take that away. No matter what I'm facing here today, no matter what this world throws at me, I am God's child and the end will be better than anything I can imagine, and that glory will never end!

The second thought I have when I look to the day of the Lord is about the false security so many have in this world. All over people are thinking, "I'm fine. I'll be safe. I've got this. Nothing to worry about." But on this day of the Lord that Paul is talking about, all of those not in Christ will realize that the comfort they've had is completely false. Everyone who believes something other than the truth of Jesus, our Savior, will quickly realize that there is a God, and it's not me. A record of my separation from God exists, and I have to pay the penalty for it.

These two thoughts lead me to go to the Father:

Thank you, Lord, for you perfect justice and endless mercy. I praise you for a Savior in Jesus. Help me see truth according to your Word, and help me make disciples of those walking in darkness. Thank you for providing true peace and security. Help me to not adopt an indifferent posture toward life, being tempted to find my hope in anything other than Jesus. Help me to work out my salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). I pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

SEPTEMBER 8

1 Thessalonians 5:12-22



IT CAN BE SO EASY TO GET DISCOURAGED WITH THE CHURCH, OR RATHER WITH THOSE INSIDE THE CHURCH.

Our local churches aren't perfect. They are full of sinners who politicize things and gossip. It has partiality and cliques.

"We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all" (5:12-14).

Paul calls us to believe the best in one another. Respect and take joy in the spiritual authority over you. Admonish, encourage, and be patient with the difficult personalities in your local body. Don't give up on the Church. It's broken but it is beautiful.

"We need the encouragement, correction, and loving involvement of others who are willing to risk everything for the sake of the beauty of the bride" (Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Because He Loves Me*). Keep praying. Keep giving thanks.

Are you willing to risk your comfort, your time, your preferences for the sake of other's sanctification?

SEPTEMBER 9

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24



WE ARE LIVING IN AN “IN-BETWEEN” TIME. JESUS HAS ALREADY LIVED A PERFECT LIFE WE COULDN’T LIVE, AND HE’S ALREADY DIED THE DEATH WE DESERVE.

The Lord has won the victory. We have claimed that. But yet, God’s work in the world isn’t finished. And he’s not finished with us individually.

The battle of sin and temptation continues in our hearts - even after we put our faith in the Lord Jesus. We still say things we shouldn’t say, we still do things we shouldn’t do, we still have sin in our hearts. But he is completely faithful to us. He remains faithful to us on days when we are completely unfaithful to him.

God keeps working on us. Our process of sanctification is never complete. He will not rest until we are completely blameless and renewed. When we chase after other gods, when we can’t be satisfied in him alone, he’s still running after us.

I was bad. I am bad. But God is good.

SEPTEMBER 10

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12



REJOICE, GIVE THANKS, GROW IN FAITH
THROUGH CONSTANT PRAYER.

After completing 1 Thessalonians, and moving on to yet another letter from Paul to a local church he established, I am moved to pray as Paul has been instructing us.

Father, you must continually correct me for my unbelief. My ability to trust you daily is terrible. Forgive my lack of faith. Forgive my unbelief. Help me to trust you more. Help me run toward situations in my life that will create the faith I desire.

Make me worthy of my calling to follow you. May your name be glorified in my life and by my words and actions according to your grace.

Father, I pray for those in my life who are far from you. May my life be evidence of your mercy, and may I use words to share your truth with those around me. Lead me to encourage and build up my family, my co-workers, my neighbors, and everyone I interact with daily. Help me make my home my primary mission field of making disciples.

Lord, help me see suffering as designed to make us worthy of your kingdom. Help those suffering around me know that no evil will triumph. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

SEPTEMBER 11

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12



FEW THINGS ARE DEBATED IN THE THEOLOGICAL WORLD MORE THAN ESCHATOLOGY (THE STUDY OF END TIMES).

This passage among other writings of Paul create uncertainty around the final events. In today's passage, Paul addresses events that must precede the return of Jesus. He brings up the "man of lawlessness", or the antichrist, in verse 3.

Regardless of where you land theologically, or what you've been taught, we can all be sure of a few things: There will always be political nightmares and beasts against the Church who oppose the truth. We much be on guard against them.

Whoever the "restrainer" may be, we can remember that God is in control. Because of his faithfulness to us, we can trust him to preserve us. God is in control of the return of Christ. God ordained these signs, and in his sovereignty we have hope.

And whatever time this man of lawlessness comes, our only defense against him will be a deep desire for God. He will tempt us by trying to appeal to our flesh. If Christ satisfies us, and if treasure the gospel, we will not be overcome.

SEPTEMBER 12

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17



IF SOMEONE ASKED YOU TODAY, RIGHT NOW, WHAT IS GOD DOING IN YOUR LIFE, HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word” (2:16-17).

Why do you have hope? These verses answer it so simply for all of us who are in Christ: “Eternal comfort and good hope through grace.”

Our hope is based on the grace of God. If God were not gracious, there wouldn’t be hope. Without grace, we could be positive thinkers or moral relativists. There would be no certainty about the future, no confidence that God is working all things for our good.

When someone asks you a reason for the hope that you have, one simple answer you can give is that you have tasted the grace of God. You have gotten hope through grace. You can’t earn it or deserve it. Rest in God’s grace; delight in it; it’s free and yours.

SEPTEMBER 13

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5



PAUL DESIRES FOR THE THESSALONIANS TO BE ENGAGED IN SPREADING THE WORD OF GOD IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS - JUST AS IT WAS WITH THEM.

So, what does he tell them to do? Pray! Pray for those carrying the Word. Even Paul, who has the gospel in him, the power of God which produces hope in others in him, needs the prayers of the saints. Ask God to open our eyes to the glory of the gospel so that when we share it with others, there is power in Christ to cause other people to believe also.

Evangelism is not carried out by Word or prayer only. He gave commands, it says in verse 4, and he prayed in verse 5. Don't stop praying. Don't stop speaking the truth of Jesus. If you are living by the Word, there will be new ways to share the gospel that doesn't sound fake or contrived.

"Our Father loves each of his children as if he had no others. We must peer into this abyss of love; plunge into this sea; dive into this depth unsearchable." -Charles Spurgeon

SEPTEMBER 14

2 Thessalonians 3:6-17



THE POINT IS NOT ALIENATION, BUT RESTORATION THROUGH TOUGH LOVE THAT INSISTS ON CHANGE. IN THESE VERSES, PAUL MODELS MERCY AND JUSTICE.

"Mercy: because, in working a secular job for his bread, he gave more time and effort than was required, and demanded less than he had a right to receive. Justice: because, in demanding that others work, he was forbidding them to demand mercy from the church and insisting that they earn their food" (John Piper).

So, how do we know when to love with mercy and when to love with justice?

We are more prone to lean toward our natural tendencies, so know yourself. If you are naturally merciful, try to think about justice more often. If you are naturally judicial, try to think about mercy more often.

The more private a situation is, the more likely giving mercy will be a loving approach. Demanding justice in these cases can seem selfish. But the more public the situation, the more likely justice will be more loving. In these cases, justice communicates care for others and not for yourself.

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

SEPTEMBER 15

1 Timothy 1:1-11



EMPTY NEST SYNDROME COMES ABOUT WHEN PARENTS OF GROWN-UP CHILDREN SUDDENLY FIND THEIR HOME VOID OF THE HECTIC NATURE OF RAISING TEENAGERS.

Often, parents either long for their children to be back with them or simply don't know what to do with their newfound time. In 1 Timothy, we find a letter from an empty-nester, the apostle Paul, written to his son in the faith, a young pastor. Without a doubt, Paul would have loved to be where Timothy was, spending time with him, teaching with him, and ministering alongside him. However, we see the sacrificial love of Paul as he urges Timothy to stay put in Ephesus, laboring in pastoral ministry for God's glory (1:3).

Paul's letter is most simply described as instructions. As he gives Timothy instructions for how to lead the church, we get to listen in and allow it to benefit our lives as well as the ministry of our local churches. Paul begins by admonishing Timothy to guard the true gospel. As Christians, we have been given a message of hope found in Jesus that we must protect. However, we must balance that guardianship against the temptation of wasting time on unfruitful debates.

Don't be the one on Facebook jumping into arguments in the comments section, thinking somehow that Jesus' ministry is being fulfilled in that. We are a people of real relationships, not vain discussions (1:6). When we spend our time investing in people instead of correcting people, the correction will come naturally through love and discipleship. All that we do flows from love, given to us by a gracious God. "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1:5).

SEPTEMBER 16

1 Timothy 1:12-17



IS CHRIST'S POWER ON FULL DISPLAY IN YOUR LIFE AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF YOUR SINFULNESS?

Complimentary colors are those that are directly across from each other when looking at a color wheel. This means that when these colors are combined, they cancel each other out because they are direct opposites. Often, sports teams will use complimentary colors on their jerseys. For example, the Florida Gators are royal blue and orange. On a jersey, those colors contrast and make the numbers truly stand out. Letters or numbers are best seen when set against a backdrop that is opposite to them. This is why you're reading black letters on a white page.

God's salvation of sinners and his employment of them in his mission is similar. God often uses the seemingly weakest people to do the most amazing things for his name. This is Paul's point. He identifies himself as the foremost of sinners. Paul viewed himself as the absolute worst, and to think that God would choose him to be an apostle shows, not Paul's might, but God's might. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, the Lord says to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

We must be careful to not think too highly of ourselves for we are nothing without Jesus. And his might displayed against the backdrop of our weakness has a purpose. It is shown to us in verse 16: "...that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." Your depravity, your mistakes, your flaws are being redeemed by Jesus so that those whom he is pursuing with grace can see an example of it in you.

SEPTEMBER 17

1 Timothy 1:18-20



WAR IMAGERY IS OFTEN THE MOST VIVID FORM OF ILLUSTRATION THE HUMAN MIND CAN THINK OF.

Throughout scripture, warfare analogies are used to describe the fight of our faith. Paul encourages his son in the faith to “wage the good warfare” (1:18). Most of us have seen enough of our global political landscape to hold the belief that war is not a good thing. But Paul uses the word “good” to describe the spiritual battle of our lives. A war can only be good if the purpose for it is noble.

To be sure, we fight for a worthy cause when we wage war for the sake of the gospel. We are fighting to defend the glory of our God and fighting to rescue the “prisoners of war” who are held captive by their sin. Paul describes some as having shipwrecked their faith. Naval battles increased in importance throughout history. Shipwrecks within warfare caused much loss of life as well as financial loss. More than that, losing ships meant a loss of territory as the enemy was able to take residence there. When people abandon the faith they seemingly once had, they allow the enemy to take over and use that to attempt to thwart our God’s battle plan.

Thankfully, we know that we serve on the winning side. In light of that, Paul boldly called out the enemy as well as those who gave the enemy any sort of foothold. This boldness and confidence comes from knowing our great general, Jesus, who secures victory for us. Today, like every day, choose to fight intentionally for the winning side. Wage good warfare and look for opportunity to push back darkness.

SEPTEMBER 18

1 Timothy 2:1-7



HOW OFTEN DO YOU PRAY FOR YOUR LEADERS? WE SHOULD BE PRAYING OFTEN FOR OUR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS.

Paul tells us that the result of our diligent prayer for our leaders is a “peaceful and quiet” life. I’m not sure about you, but I often feel like a peaceful and quiet life is always elusive. This is mostly due to the fact that my young children are seemingly always in a chaotic state. But it doesn’t take intense observation from us to see that our world is in a chaotic state as well.

Romans 8:20-21 says, “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Because of our sin, the state of this world is dismal. We see racial tension in our nation and wars around the world. Along with these issues, many other events and issues remind us that this world is not really a desirable place to live, although it is our only option. In light of this, we are driven to our knees to pray for our world, the nations, our communities, and our leaders.

Paul says that when God grants us a peaceful and quiet life in the midst of a fallen, chaotic world, we will be godly and dignified. Now, being a true born and bred redneck from southern West Virginia, I don’t recall ever being described as dignified. The literal definition of the word Paul uses there means the characteristic of a person deserving of respect. When we pray diligently, we’re granted peace and are respected by others leading to opportunities for gospel advancement.

SEPTEMBER 19

1 Timothy 2:8-15



PAUL WRITES SOME BRIEF INSTRUCTION TO TIMOTHY CONCERNING GENDER ROLES WITHIN THE CHURCH.

Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” The issue of gender has sadly become a very controversial issue in today’s culture. We are surrounded by evidences of gender roles being reversed and people who are genuinely confused about their sexuality and their gender identity. The reality is that God has created male and female from the beginning.

Coming out of Paul’s exhortation to be people of prayer, men are called upon to lead by being men of prayer. A consistent prayer life will keep us from anger and a temptation to be divisive or quarrelsome. Conversely, Paul then addresses the role of women in the church, in the essence of what they are forbidden to do. Paul was likely addressing some prevalent issues among women in the Ephesian church. Because Paul doesn’t say what women should do (only what they shouldn’t) this passage has been attacked as chauvinistic.

Paul clearly says that women are forbidden to teach, but that they should learn in submissiveness. The word used, *didaskain* (to teach), is used in scripture to describe authoritative teaching in the local church. So a balanced interpretation of this text is needed. Misinterpretation on one end would say that this command is merely cultural in first century Ephesus and that women can be pastors today. Misinterpretation on the other end would say that women have a strict dress code and they’re not even permitted to speak. Truly, women are equal with men and the proper interpretation is that women are silent when it comes to a pastoral voice in the church.

SEPTEMBER 20

1 Timothy 3:1-7



WHEN I FIRST BECAME A PASTOR, I REMEMBER BEING ANNOYED WHEN ANYONE WOULD SEEMINGLY HOLD ME TO A HIGHER STANDARD.

“Aren’t you a preacher? You shouldn’t act like that.” I understand that I’m still in the flesh and still sin, but it often seems like many others don’t see that. But looking into scripture hits me like a ton of bricks. Pastors are indeed held to a high standard.

This passage of scripture is surely a noble goal for every believer. But pastors especially are called to be “above reproach.” This shows us that a pastor’s reputation truly does matter. And it’s wise for every Christian to also care about their reputation. The notion that “only God can judge me” is true but is not the attitude that we should have. The unfortunate truth is that many, if not most, non-believers are more turned off by Christians than they are by Christian doctrine.

This should lead us to a deep respect for our spiritual leaders. If you’re a pastor, thank you so much for your faithful service to Jesus’ bride. For the rest of us, we ought to feel a deep gratitude and appreciation for our pastors, and not just during pastor appreciation month. Maybe take this day to let your pastor (or pastors) know that you care. Send a text message or do something practical for them. Many pastors fight depression and stress that goes unnoticed by many. The nature of the job is to bear people’s pain and then smile big when the next ministry opportunity comes along. Show some love to a pastor today but ultimately give all the glory to God for calling faithful men into this ministry within the church. Ephesians 4:11-12 tells us they’re a gift to us to equip us for ministry.

SEPTEMBER 21

1 Timothy 3:8-13



YESTERDAY YOU HOPEFULLY APPRECIATED YOUR PASTORS. TODAY YOU NEED TO APPRECIATE YOUR DEACONS.

Paul naturally moves on from pastoral requirements to deacon requirements. Similarly, the bar is set very high.

Again, these are things that all of us should attempt to portray in our lives as Christians. But deacons are called upon to be blameless! The word means to be complete and lacking nothing. A good deacon is not a novice or lacking in his development of service to the church. The word deacon literally means, “through the dirt.” A good deacon should never be afraid to get his hands dirty, for that is the very essence and meaning of his title!

When the first deacons were chosen in Acts 6, they were chosen to free up the pastors to pray and devote themselves to teaching the gospel. Recently, our church staff went through and delegated many small tasks to some faithful servants in our church. As a pastor, it felt like an unbelievable weight was lifted off of me when many of these service oriented tasks were lovingly taken by servants (deacons) in the church. It made me instantly a more efficient pastor as I had more time and more mental focus to work on my calling.

So maybe you could consider today, how you can serve your church in a higher capacity tomorrow. What small job can you take that could take some weight off one of your pastors or deacons? Even though many tasks may seem small to you, oftentimes the small jobs are exactly what are needed done the most to alleviate ministry paralysis. Go and model our Lord Jesus, who took the form of a servant and appreciate your deacons today!

SEPTEMBER 22

1 Timothy 3:14-16



I GREW UP IN RURAL WEST VIRGINIA AND WENT TO CHURCH OFTEN AS A KID.

I remember the church building continually being referred to as “God’s House.” I can remember wondering as a child if God actually lived at the little white building by the side of the road. The thought can be confusing for sure, especially for a child. Interestingly enough, Paul used that phrase before any local church ever owned a building. For hundreds of years a Christianity was being established, no church owned a building.

The household of God is not a place we assemble, it is seen when we assemble. The household is the people assembled, not the building of assembly. Elsewhere, we are described as living stones, fit together to form God’s temple, as he dwells within his people. As we gather for corporate worship and ordinances, we ought to conduct ourselves in a way that is respectful, reverent, and worshipful. This was the purpose of Paul’s writing in this section of 1 Timothy.

The church, Paul says, is a pillar of truth. That truth is reflected in the gospel message that we have been saved through, entrusted with, and commissioned to proclaim. Paul outlines this truth with six lines of a credal hymn from the first century. This short creed proclaims to the hearts of God’s church the truth of redemption found in Jesus and reminds us of our marching orders. Paul had just finished giving some clear instructions to the church. Many of those instructions can seem, at times, impossible to fulfill. But when we meditate on the simple, concise gospel truth of verse 16, we are motivated to proper behavior in the household of God as well as even proper missionary behavior in the world.

SEPTEMBER 23

1 Timothy 4:1-5



IT IS A DANGEROUS THING TO ADD TO THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

God's design of how he saves is presented to us in the gospel message and that message cannot be altered by any man. Adding requirements to the gospel is legalism and is strongly condemned in scripture.

False teachers and Christians led astray in the city of Ephesus were working to convince Christians that there were other necessary requirements for Christians. Paul calls them out, referring to them as liars. Marriage, a good thing instituted by God in creation, is one of the things that they were working to forbid. Their argument was avoiding sexual relations altogether was the holiest way to please God so marriage should be prohibited.

Additionally, they were implementing strict dietary laws upon Christians. I think many Baptists who love Potluck Sundays could greatly benefit from some dietary restrictions, but such a thing is not gospel-centered. God wants us to enjoy things in life to his glory. Food and drink are available for our pleasure, enjoyed in moderation. But to tie our salvation to meals and spouses is silly and contrary to Jesus' work on the cross.

At stake here is a true understanding of what Jesus accomplished at Calvary. Did he purchase us as his children or did he invite us into a system of rules in which we could potentially save ourselves? I hope you know the former is true. He atoned for our sins, taking the Father's wrath on our behalf. Our debt has been paid and we are under no obligations, prerequisites, or laws. We are free to live to God's glory and out of gratitude, abstain from sin for the sake of the gospel. We proclaim the same good news we received, that salvation is by grace alone.

SEPTEMBER 24

1 Timothy 4:6-10



WORKING OUT HAS PROVEN TO BE VERY VALUABLE FOR ME. WHEN I GO TO WORK OUT, I BURN CALORIES, LOSE SOME WEIGHT, FEEL BETTER, AND THINK CLEARER.

I see great value in exercise, but Paul says that bodily training is of “some” value. Now, this is not to say that none of us should exercise. God wants us to take care of our bodies and be healthy. But Paul’s point is that we should strive to exercise our spiritual muscles more so that we can attain godliness.

To attain godliness, we are given a directive as well as something to avoid. The directive is to train ourselves. Spiritual development and discipleship is something that we should never grow out of. You’ve probably fallen behind at some point in this devotional book or you may be behind now. Don’t get discouraged. Instead of worrying about “catching up,” just focus on training from this day forward. Know that you’ll have bad training days, but diligence will reap a great reward: godliness.

The thing we’re told to avoid is “irreverent, silly myths.” I often see theologians (or “wannabe” theologians) on Facebook arguing about the most minute details of doctrine. I can’t help but ask myself what the point is. To be clear, Paul is not telling us to avoid correcting anyone or talking about doctrine. But it does seem that he is trying to protect Timothy from distractions from his ministry. To truly be godly, avoid silly debates on religion and focus on discipleship and evangelism. Focus on living your life in a way that is wholeheartedly dedicated to the Lord. For when we live godly lives, non-believers take notice and the Lord is glorified in our testimonies.

SEPTEMBER 25

1 Timothy 4:11-16



CHRISTIAN BROTHER OR SISTER, DO NOT BE AFRAID TO LOOK TO YOUNGER PEOPLE FOR AN EXAMPLE!

I began preaching when I was only 20 years old. As a young preacher who honestly didn't have a clue about what I was trying to do, I clung to 1 Timothy 4:12, "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." God often uses younger people and their energy, passion, and zeal to do amazing ministry in his name. When young people full of energy are paired with old people full of wisdom, the church is a powerful force. Now that I'm a little older, I long for younger days and the energy (and time) that I used to have. But I'm also thankful for the wisdom that I've been privileged to gain. A healthy balance of seeking examples in older and younger believers around me keeps me centered in godliness.

The young pastor, Timothy, is given three primary objectives as he pastors the church at Ephesus: publicly read the Bible, exhort others, and teach others. These elements should be prevalent and commonplace within your church. These three things feed us as Christians and fuel us week after week. Timothy is told to immerse himself in these tasks. If you are immersed in water, it means that you are completely submerged; there is not a part of you that water is not touching. Is there any part of you that those three important ministries aren't reaching? Maybe you're hearing it but not feeling it in your heart. Or maybe it is but the gospel isn't translating to your hands and your actions. Let yourself be immersed in the hope of the gospel today and within your church.

SEPTEMBER 26

1 Timothy 5:1-16



YESTERDAY, WE LOOKED AT THE VALUE OF YOUNG CHRISTIANS THAT IS OFTEN OVERLOOKED.

Paul naturally progresses to the value of older Christians and the necessity of their care. Christians who have long labored in the faith and are later in life should not be ignored. They should be greatly respected and honored. Paul tells the young pastor to speak to older men in his congregation as fathers. He also goes into some detailed instructions on the good ministry of caring for widows.

In the first century, widows would have found themselves in especially difficult scenarios. Due to the culture of the day, many women were simply unable to earn a reasonable income for themselves so widows found themselves helpless at times. The church had a solution: care should be administered to make sure these believing ladies were taken care of. James 1:27 says, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

The principle here is that the gospel compels us to help those who can’t or have trouble helping themselves. Unfortunately, the care that the church is called to give often seems more like a burden than a blessing. It is a privilege to be able to help others, especially those who have lived godly lives. Verse 10 says, “if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.” We should be on the lookout for people like that to care for. Perhaps you can start today by thinking of someone like this, praying for them, and reaching out to serve them.

SEPTEMBER 27

1 Timothy 5:17-25



UNFORTUNATELY, IT CAN BECOME EASY FOR US TO CRITICIZE OUR PASTORS.

Those of us who have spent a number of years in the church have likely seen very vividly how ugly church operations can sometimes be. If you have yet to see that, be warned that you will probably see it rear its ugly head eventually. Paul takes yet another opportunity to address some issues about honor of our pastors.

Our tendency can be to critique every word in a sermon or read too much into a comment or the lack of a handshake on a busy Sunday. Paul says that elders (pastors) are worthy of double honor. That leads Paul to contend for payment to ministers. He references an Old Testament law that forbade people to muzzle an ox while it was in the field. There was a principle that God instituted within the law that cared for the ox: as the ox worked for the man, it was only right that the ox was able to eat from the field it worked in, thereby fulfilling its needs. Pastors are compared to oxen. As they labor in the field of ministry, they have a right to earn their living from the field of ministry.

Now, not every pastor must be vocational. Some of our best are bi-vocational. Sometimes churches simply aren't able to have a "full-time" pastor. But God's principle here is that all pastors are worthy of whatever can be given because if we're honest, all pastors are full-time. There's never a time they stop being a pastor and occasions of ministry continually come up. Because of that, we honor them, we bless them, we provide for them, and we do all we can to not place a metaphorical muzzle on our pastors.

SEPTEMBER 28

1 Timothy 6:1-10



WE SHOULD LIVE WITH A HEALTHY REALIZATION THAT ALL OF OUR STUFF ULTIMATELY BELONGS TO GOD.

I think almost every preacher has used the visual illustration of a hearse with a U-Haul trailer hitched to the back of it. You never see such a thing. The point is that you cannot take any of your possessions with you when you leave this world. Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:7 that “we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.”

“For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine” (Psalm 50:10-12).

I love the idea that God “owns the cattle on a thousand hills.” It’s like a redneck, West Virginia way of saying that God owns it all. When we realize that God actually owns everything then we understand that we are merely stewards of God’s things. Our money, homes, and possessions have been given to us for us to use as gospel leverage for his glory.

Those who fail to realize this will pursue riches. That is a depressing pursuit. Many people misquote verse 10 and say that money is the root of all evil. That’s not correct; money is a gift from God that can be used for his glory. But the love of money will take root in a sinful heart and produce in us all kinds of sin that we don’t even realize we’re capable of. Guard your hearts against greed, give generously to gospel work, and be content with your life.

SEPTEMBER 29

1 Timothy 6:11-16



I LOVE TO SIT DOWN WITH A GOOD BOOK AND READ VERY DESCRIPTIVE WRITING. THE PROLIFIC USE OF ADJECTIVES AND BEAUTIFUL LANGUAGE CREATES A SORT OF PAINTING TO ME.

Paul puts his writing on full display as he nears the end of his letter, inspired by our Lord of course. He grows doxological as he seeks to stir up in Timothy a motivation to continue ministry.

When I was young I played a lot of sports. My parents instilled in me a drive and a resilience and one thing that was never an option was quitting. I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that uniforms and shoes had already been purchased but nevertheless, when I started a sports season, quitting due to any reason wasn't a choice for me.

Just as my father would tell me not to quit, Timothy's spiritual dad tells him the same thing. He urges him to "fight the good fight of faith," drawing upon a vivid analogy again in this letter. It is likely that the pressures of ministry were weighing heavy on Timothy and he felt like throwing in the towel.

Maybe that's where you are today. Maybe your ministry or your job or your family feels so frazzled that you just feel like giving up. Don't. Press forward. Our God is worth your perseverance. Maybe you're feeling energized? If so, think of someone who may be running on fumes and fill their tank with some encouragement today. An encouraging word to "keep fighting" can mean a lot to someone and it doesn't take much effort to deliver.

SEPTEMBER 30

1 Timothy 6:17-21



PAUL FINISHES THIS LETTER BY REMINDING US THAT EVEN IF WE AREN'T WEALTHY BY WORLDLY STANDARDS, WE ARE WEALTHY BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE GOSPEL MESSAGE.

I grew up in a very wealthy family, at least by West Virginia standards. I began to realize we were especially wealthy because of where we lived: one of the poorest counties in the mountain state. In spite of all the money that my parents made, you wouldn't really have known it. We drove cars that didn't break down but they weren't fancy. Our house was only big enough for us, and a couple siblings even shared bedrooms. We were intentionally meager.

Growing up frugal taught me one of the greatest lessons from my parents: generosity. I saw them continually helping neighbors and loving on folks in our community. Paul charges the wealthy people of Ephesus to the same lifestyle. Your wealth has not been given to you for your comfort, but for God's glory. In light of the realization that God owns everything, every penny spent must be subject to his will.

And then we come to understand that we're all wealthy. Compared to the rest of the world, I guarantee that you are among the top tier of human beings when it comes to wealth. I know that just by where you live. So this is written to us. We have a radical call to generosity for the purpose of gospel mission.

We are driven to grace toward others because grace has been shown to us. This is why Timothy is called to "guard the deposit" that was given to him. We have been given a great gift. Just as we ought to be careful with our wealth, we ought to be careful with the gospel, striving to keep the message pure and see it proclaimed to many.

OCTOBER 1

2 Timothy 1:1-7



WHEN I WAS 12 OR 13, OUR FAMILY WENT TO WILMINGTON, N.C. TO STAY WITH FRIENDS AND ENJOY THE BEACH.

The first two days were great. Then it happened. It's 1975, and the movie "JAWS" debuted that summer. Surprisingly, many thought it would be a good idea to go see this movie. Little did we know, the only seats available were on the front row! The next day, we went back to the beach, but I refused to even dip a toe in the ocean that had been my best friend the day before. Fear is real, whether experienced or manufactured. To this day, I still have a fear of sharks because of my experience on that July evening.

Paul continued his encouragement to his "dearly beloved child" in his second letter. I love the relationship that they enjoyed because Paul spoke in black and white, and Timothy did not need to be coddled. He spoke words of wisdom into his life. Fear is real, and Paul addressed this in verses 6 and 7. He first reminds him to "keep ablaze the gift of God that is in you" and then gives an incredible word by which to live. "For God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and sound judgment." "The New American Commentary" states, "The Holy Spirit does not produce a spirit of cowardice. A spirit of cowardice would falter under the load of responsibilities that Paul was placing on Timothy. Instead, the Holy Spirit produces power, a reference to a forcefulness of character that can use authority boldly."

These are gentle words to a young pastor from a seasoned one. Fortunately, they also speak to our spirit as believers. There can be much to fear in this world, but Proverbs 29:25 reminds us, "The fear of man is a snare, but the one who trusts the LORD is protected."

OCTOBER 2

2 Timothy 1:8-12



AS A TEENAGER, I WAS A PSEUDO-CHRISTIAN AND WASN'T SURE WHAT IT MEANT TO FOLLOW CHRIST.

In light of that fact, I was a pseudo rebellious teenager, but rarely the instigator of the “bad” stuff. That doesn’t excuse my behavior, but it did save my rear end many times. Why? Because I was too scared to get caught. So, I tended to be the one standing in the back so that I could sneak away just at the right time. I was scared to get caught for one reason—my father. I never wanted to taint what it meant to be his son. I always knew what was right and wrong, but approached life from never wanting my dad to be ashamed of me.

Paul approaches the gospel in the same light. He said, “So don’t be ashamed for the testimony about our Lord, or me his prisoner” (1:8). He understood the sacrifice made by Christ, and admonished Timothy to always be willing to stand tall for the gospel. From whom do we base our testimony? Upon Jesus “who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace” (1:9). When we stand for Christ, it is not for our own honor, honor of family, or pride of our country, but for the name above all names – Jesus Christ.

Paul reiterates this same idea in verses 11-12, “For this [gospel] I was appointed a herald, apostle, and teacher... I am not ashamed because I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day.” What day? The Day of the Lord, when all the works of our life will be laid out for judgment. Only those things that were of God will last, so let us focus on those things that will bring glory to Christ on that day.

OCTOBER 3

2 Timothy 1:13-2:13



THIS CHAPTER IS A PIVOTAL POINT IN PAUL'S LETTER TO TIMOTHY.

Paul was deserted by many who had first begun to follow Christ, and what Paul taught. Not all who say they are followers are true followers. Phygelus and Hermogenes were called out as deserters of the name of Christ, but let us not be so quick to judge those who seem to have lost their backbone.

The first century was not an easy time. When one said yes to Jesus, it became a loss of livelihood, friendships, and even a death sentence for many. It placed a label on one's shirt or blouse that said, "I am a deserter of the Jewish or Pagan traditions, please persecute me!" Fast forward two thousand years and consider Christian America. How hard was it to make a commitment to Christ forty, thirty, or even twenty years ago? Not very. Things have changed. The youngest generation now being born will be the hardest demographic to reach over the next 30-40 years.

Paul made sure that did not happen to Timothy. He loved him in such a way that being blunt was much more important than being politically correct. Verse two says, "And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." The essence of this verse is a discipleship mentoring mandate. There is no more important activity in which a Christian can be involved than mentoring and teaching another believer. When someone says yes to Jesus, there ought to be older men or women clamoring to sit down with that person so that they don't fall on fallow ground. Take time to read Matthew 13:3-9. Otherwise, we might all become a Phygelus or Hermogenes.

OCTOBER 4

2 Timothy 2:14-19



WHEN ONE BECOMES A BELIEVER, HE OR SHE IS LIKE AN EMPTY WHITEBOARD.

There is nothing else there—no experience, no education, no discipleship, and no remembrances of Christ’s goodness. Therefore, a new believer is at the risk of never maturing as God desires. Timothy was a young pastor, but also seasoned in the Word. Paul took a moment to help him see the importance of focusing on the right priorities, so fighting “about words” is not profitable use of ministry time.

He knew that if a man of God is studying, involved in meaningful worship, and engaging people with the gospel, he “doesn’t need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth” (2:15). The word he used to describe that believer is “approved to God.” This word approved is the Greek word *dokimos* which means “to be accepted, pleasing.” According to Donald Barnhouse, the only true legal tender in the Roman world were coins made of metal. There was a practice of shaving down the edges of coins after circulation which would condemn them counterfeit. The picture Paul was painting of approval was one of the integrity of money changers. When a money changer was honest, he would not accept any money coins that had been shaven. This practice became known as money changers of approved character. Unfortunately, the only picture we have of money changers are those in the temple when Christ ran them out. Apparently, not all of them were dishonest.

Paul said to disregard those who falsely spread the Word because their godlessness would be obvious, and their teaching could spread like gangrene in a poisoned human body. To combat that cancer, continue to know that truth because the truth, and good works that follow will last in the end. Let us take Paul’s advice and do the same.

OCTOBER 5

2 Timothy 2:20-26



WHEN I GOT MARRIED, I HELPED MY WIFE DECIDE WHAT EVERYDAY DISHES AND CHINA TO PURCHASE FOR OUR HOME.

Actually, I really had no choice and always said, “That one is beautiful, honey.” This dishware obviously had different purposes. The everyday ware was just that—we used it just about every day and every meal, and after 26 years, it is still useful. China had a different purpose—to sit in a cabinet and look nice. The only time we ever used the china was for special occasions like birthdays or Mother’s Day.

In this passage, Paul spoke of two different types of household dishes. One is made of gold and silver, the other of wood and clay. His point was that some are for special use, some for ordinary. So if anyone purifies himself—set apart, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. In other words, Paul was saying that there were two types of teachers in the church, true and false ones. Only the ones that were teaching the Truth will last because their words were made of gold and silver which can be refined in fire. Those teacher’s words of wood and clay will be burned up with their works. Paul also said in 1 Corinthians 3:12, “If anyone builds on that foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw... the fire will test the quality of each one’s work.” May we never be pious to think that we will not be judged for what we say, preach, or perform. All works will be placed before the Trinity to be tested.

He finishes this chapter by pleading with Timothy to be diligent in righteousness, so that as we teach faithfully, maybe false teachers “may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” (2:26).

OCTOBER 6

2 Timothy 3:1-9



EVERY GENERATION FROM EVERY CENTURY HAS THE THOUGHT THAT THEY ARE LIVING IN THE WORST TIME OF SINFUL HISTORY.

It makes sense as people around you are acting like there are no boundaries, no rules, and believe there should be no consequences to their actions. The world is a very gray and amoral place. The issue becomes immoral only if someone else is involved, but if it is you— you are being judged.

Paul says, “But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money...” (3:1-2) and includes an incredibly revealing list of ways the world is acting at that time. It is also convicting for us now, if read them with an open heart. We have become an international, intercultural world of sin. There is now nothing that one cannot experience, if one wants it bad enough. And if honesty prevails, Paul is saying that it was true even in the first century. This fact shows again how relevant the Bible is to all who have an ear to listen.

One truth one must embrace is that the “last days” started in the first century and will not be completed until the glorious return of Christ. After Paul’s list of warning during these days, he says the false teachers were “having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people” (3:5). First, the impostors possessed an outward appearance of Christianity, but denied its essence, or character. Those kinds will not last long under the power of true Bible teaching. He concludes by encouraging Timothy to love them, but avoid their ways, thoughts, and influences. Sometimes we just have to make hard choices.

OCTOBER 7

2 Timothy 3:10-13



IAM CONSISTENTLY AMAZED BY PAUL'S PERSEVERANCE.

In Acts 14, after Paul and Barnabas have evangelized the temple complex in Antioch of Pisidia and Iconium, the Jews in that city instigate a protest that quickly turned ugly. The Gentiles jump in, but Paul and Barnabas go east to Lystra. It becomes dangerous there also as rioters follow them there with the intention to kill them both. After healing a lame man and presenting the gospel to the people there, Paul is stoned and left for dead. After recovering from the stoning, they continue preaching in Derbe, and then travel back through the cities of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to encourage the believers in those cities! If it were me, I would have found a safer way home. “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

In verses 10-11 of 2 Timothy, Paul reminds Timothy of that incident as he recounts the persecutions that he encountered there. Paul's admonition surrounding those issues was to “follow my teaching” because “all those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” In America, Orthodox Christianity is no doubt becoming a more difficult sect in which to be a part, but it pales in comparison to persecution around the world. We really won't know what it means to be persecuted until our jobs are taken from us, we are thrown in jail, or our lives are in danger. No doubt, it is uncomfortable when believers are called names or passed up for a promotion, but America does not understand true biblical persecution. We tend to pray for that reality to be in the distant future, but if not, remember Jesus told us it would happen in Matthew 5:11-12. Don't be discouraged by the world's demise. Rather, redeem the time so that others will see Jesus in our persecution.

OCTOBER 8

2 Timothy 3:14-17



AUTHORITY IS A LOST WORD IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

Everyone has the corner on correctness, but right is relative. Why? Because authority comes now from one's own feelings, not from God, nor government guidelines. Where does your authority come? What do you stand on when someone asks you that question? It should only come from one source—Scripture.

From what authority does Paul base his words upon? How can he be so sure about his instruction? Because the Scriptures point to these truths. At the time of his letter, the Scriptures pointed only to the Old Testament scrolls. Did he know that his letters would be placed in a New Testament canon? I don't see how, yet this letter, included in the canon, consists of this most powerful passage in the Scriptures themselves. "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" (3:16-17). At least six basic points stand out:

1. All Scripture came from God's mouth.
2. It is teachable and a positive source for Christian doctrine.
3. It is reliable to rebuke and expose false teachers
4. It is capable of bending the path of one through discipleship.
5. It is useful for instruction and continued growth in Christ.
6. It is the authority to equip those who place themselves under it.

The Word of God will last forever, even in the most hostile cultures. Read it. Believe it. Live it.

OCTOBER 9

2 Timothy 4:1-5



THIS IS A HUMBLING MESSAGE, AND ONE WITH ETERNAL IMPLICATIONS. THE IDEA IS ALL WILL STAND BEFORE CHRIST TO BE JUDGED.

2 Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” This judgment refers to all believers, but I believe that pastors will stand at a higher judgement for correctly imparting the Word to listeners. Paul’s charge to Timothy was simple in word, but difficult in practice, “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season” (4:2).

This culture might consider preaching as an 11 a.m. service at the local church building, but that’s not the case for Timothy. False teachers had made their way into the church body, poisoning some that were less mature. Paul challenged him because “the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (4:3). Ladies and gentlemen, that time it **now**! Paul saw the danger of incorrect doctrine and was warning his young friend to be aware of wolves in sheep’s clothing who had come to slaughter young believers in his congregation.

In America, people are looking for the next best thing—next cell phone, next car, next job, for goodness’ sake, the next spouse or partner. This country is a culture of “itching ears” and for that matter, itching eyes. Paul encourages Timothy to “endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” You don’t have to be a pastor, or a preacher to heed these words. Wherever God has you, don’t look for the next thing. Instead, first fulfill the ministry he has for you where you are.

OCTOBER 10

2 Timothy 4:6-8



ITHINK IT IS INTERESTING TO READ THE LAST WORDS OF FAMOUS PEOPLE.

- “I should never have switched from Scotch to Martinis.” (Humphrey Bogart)
- “I see black light.” (Victor Hugo)

These two quotes don’t give much hope for humanity or their approach to the afterlife. I often wonder what my own last words will be because I would hope that they would be inspirational or profound. Paul, on the other hand, had some incredible last words with which to encourage the Church. As you read yesterday, in the first five verses of this chapter, Paul charges Timothy with the duty of preaching the Word correctly. He loved this young man with all that he had, and longed to see his ministry continue with the power of the Holy Spirit. Preaching the Word was his most important purpose.

In verses 6-8, Paul then pours his heart out with words of hope, knowing he had nothing to regret or fear. Early on, his life had been full of mistakes, but now he was finishing with Christ in complete control of his life. He knew he would not live much longer when he stated, “the time for my departure is close.” He put his trust in God many years before, and never looked back. His hope in Christ finished with this statement, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” Whenever he was finally executed, I often wondered if those were his last words from the gallows.

So, what might be your last words? What do you think you might say? The problem with this thought is that you may not have the opportunity to say anything. Therefore, it is important that all of us speak words of kindness and hope while God gives us the means to do so.

OCTOBER 11

2 Timothy 4:9-22



PAUL SAW MUCH DISLOYALTY DURING HIS MINISTRY AND LIFETIME. ON THE OTHER HAND, PAUL ENDS HIS LETTER COMMENDING THOSE LOYAL TO HIM AND CHRIST.

Loyalty is a characteristic that has dwindled away over years of moral decline. It seems as though individuals get what they want out of others, then tend to stab them in the back. All who are reading can relate to this practice in some form. God does not intend it that way, but depravity can run deep within relationships. This practice tends to cause one to be unwilling to be a friend who stays closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24).

In verse 9, Crescens and Titus had apparently gone to continue their work elsewhere. Luke had stuck around when everyone else had left him. In verse 11, Mark, who had disappointed Paul on his first missionary journey, was now “very useful to me in the ministry.” Desertion arises again (4:16), but he gives all glory to Christ as the one who strengthened him, so that the proclamation might be made (4:17). His final declaration to Timothy was a victory cry, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (4:18).

Finally, Paul asked Timothy to greet Priscilla, Aquila, and Onesiphorus. He also commends people who must have been very special to his ministry. Regardless of how they ministered to Paul, he felt the need to name them personally. Take a moment to think about those who have been loyal friends and gospel partners to you. It might be a good time to write a letter, craft an email, or send them a text to say thank you and “grace be with you” (4:22).

OCTOBER 12

Titus 1



THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF DISCERNMENT MEANS ONE CAN PERCEIVE OR RECOGNIZE SOMETHING BY SIGHT OR SOME OTHER SENSE, OR BY INTELLECT.

Paul possessed this gift, but coupled with the gift of prophecy and proclamation, he was not afraid to tell someone the truth.

This letter is written to another pastor who Paul was grooming named Titus. Apparently, there were quite a few problems in Crete with those who had spewed false doctrine. If you ever wanted to see a true job description, Paul charged Titus with the job to appoint elders in every town. Then he gave him a list of what an elder should look like and what his behavior should be. There is no question what type of men should be in the pastoral role.

Why did Paul tell Titus to find men who could become pastors? The people needed to be guided by men who understood the role of Christ and the Church in the communities. They were people with no shepherd, and the communities were starving for guidance and leadership. Paul says of the people, “One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’ This testimony is true.” (1:12-13). Let’s face it, we discern things in the lives of others, but don’t have the guts to say half of what should be said. Right?

Don’t use this devotion as a license to go tell your neighbor what they are doing wrong, or the cousin you can’t stomach to jump off a cliff. This chapter helps us understand the importance of living the Christian life in holiness, and when we can be discerning, use it in a way that will leave the peace of Christ in their soul as they walk away. There is a time and place for everything.

OCTOBER 13

Titus 2



IFIND IT INTERESTING, AND FRIGHTENING, WHEN I SEE THE NUMBER OF DIVORCES AND SINGLE-PARENTING IN AMERICA.

These statistics are from the U.S. Department of Census:

- 64.3 million fathers across the nation - 26.5 million are married-couple families with their children under the age of 18.
- 2.5 million single fathers, up from 400,000 in 1970. Currently 18% of single parents living with their children are men.
- 43% of US children live without their father.
- 90% of homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes.

Our world bends towards life as useless after age fifty. I starkly disagree. I think of multiple men who were older as I was trying to learn how to be a man. I was fortunate to possess a godly father, married into a godly family, and was blessed with fantastic mentors and friends. As I look around our world, it seems somewhat unfair that I was blessed so richly. Amazingly, it is still hard to live the Christian life.

Paul encouraged Titus to teach the importance of spiritually mature men and women to pass on the ways of godliness to those which they had influence. “Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children” (2:3-4). In the same manner he stated, “Older men are to be sober-minded... Urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works” (2:2, 6-7). What great godly advice Paul had for a young pastor to take and use as he is leading new believers.

OCTOBER 14

Titus 3



FALSE TEACHERS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN PRESENT. PAUL WAS NOT AFRAID TO ADDRESS THEM, AND ENCOURAGED PASTORS TO DO THE SAME.

What if Paul had not approached false teachers early in the New Testament Church? What was the motivation? A believer always needs to remember what type of life from which they came! Much has been forgiven, so it helps one to approach others with respect, love, and kindness. He states, “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures” (3:3). Verse 3 is a stark reminder of what Christ has done for and in us.

He then reproduces the foundation of forgiveness through Jesus in verses 4 through 7. I don’t know what it sounds like in Greek, but in modern English it poetically flows with the works of Christ, and words like goodness, righteousness, mercy, regeneration, renewal, justified, and eternal life. So many of us who preach on a consistent basis, skip over the attractiveness of Paul’s words here.

He then closes with this admonishment: don’t waste your time on those who try to discredit you, destroy you, or disregard the truth. “But avoid foolish controversies... As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned” (3:9-11). I know this warning is primarily how to deal with false teachers, but years ago, I had an internal church issue with a member. I was struggling with how to deal with them. Fortunately, my 68-year-old mother at the time, shared these verses with me to help deal with the issue. Instead of lashing out, I remembered how much I had been forgiven, and let God deal with that person. Some of the best advice I have ever received.

OCTOBER 15

Philemon 1



WE LOVE STORIES OF SECOND CHANCES BECAUSE WE ARE A PEOPLE OF SECOND, THIRD, AND ONE HUNDRED CHANCES. WITHOUT SECOND CHANCES, WE ARE DOOMED.

In 2003, 13-year-old Bethany Hamilton, was out surfing with her family. She was attacked by a shark and lost her left arm. Fortunately, her family knew what to do, got her to the hospital, and saved her life. Bethany thought her life and dream for surfing was over, but through the encouragement of family and a youth leader, Bethany realized that God had saved her physically and spiritually for a reason. In 2007, she became a professional surfer and is still living her dream.

Onesimus was in need of a second chance. He was a slave of Philemon but had run away. Providence has it that Onesimus would be thrown in prison with none other than Paul. Wow! Paul got to know him, led him to Christ, and eventually wrote this letter to ask Philemon to take Onesimus back as a brother in Christ. Three things stand out according to the "New American Commentary."

Onesimus' New Life (10-11): Paul considered himself a father to him and saw real change as they spent time together.

Onesimus' Desire for Restitution (12): Paul was willing to send him because of Onesimus' willingness to make things right with Philemon.

Onesimus' Value of Service (13-14): He could be of great usefulness to Paul there in the Roman prison but knew that his return to Philemon would be greater evidence of the power of Christianity in that household and community.

Don't ever devalue the beauty and the power of the second chance – you are one!

OCTOBER 16

Hebrews 1:1-4



PEOPLE OFTEN ASK, WHEN CONFRONTED WITH THE CLAIMS OF CHRIST, “WHY WOULD GOD SEND HIS SON JESUS TO THIS EARTH?”

It’s a good question. The writer of Hebrews answers this question for us. Very simply, Jesus was and is God’s perfect revelation of himself to us. Hebrews 1:2 says, “In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son.”

That one verse speaks volumes to us. Jesus is God’s final Word because he is God’s perfect Word. In previous generations, God spoke, but his Words to us were incomplete. He could not speak perfectly through the prophets or the leaders. When Jesus came, however, God spoke to us perfectly. Look at how he is described in 1:2-4. Jesus is Heir of all things; he made the worlds; he is the Brightness (source) of God’s glory; he sustains all things; he paid for our sins. And then Hebrews says that Jesus sat down. The reason he sat down was because all that he did was fully and completely sufficient. Nothing more needed to be done. Therefore, what we learn about God and know about him is revealed to us perfectly through Christ.

Here’s what those ideas mean. We do not need any more revelation outside of Jesus and his Word. The Bible and what it reveals to us about Jesus is enough. Do not look for a new revelation. We have the revelation about God. His name is Jesus. Through Jesus, God has shown us exactly what he is like. He has revealed to us perfectly his great love and has shown us the perfect way into salvation. Jesus is God’s perfect revelation.

OCTOBER 17

Hebrews 1:5-14



THE BACKGROUND TO HEBREWS IS THAT, BY THE TIME THIS LETTER WAS BEING WRITTEN (67-69 AD), BELIEVERS WERE COMING UNDER GREAT PERSECUTION.

It would get worse as time progressed. The temptation was to go back to their old ways of life – to look longingly at the Levitical priesthood, with its human mediators, and daily sacrifices, as they did when they left Egypt and suffered hardship on the way to the Promised Land, forgetting how bad Egypt was.

We face similar temptations. Sometimes it is difficult to live the Christian life, and we are tempted to go back to our old ways. It is not that we will quit believing; we just will not have the same level of commitment as we did before and may fall back into some old habits or an old lifestyle.

Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is superior to all things. The reason that we do not want to go back is because Christ is better than everything. Through a series of Old Testament quotes, Hebrews sets forth one of the greatest statements about who Christ is ever made in Scripture: He is clearly called God and is eternal (1:7-8). The angels are mere servants; Jesus' job is to be Lord. He is true, just, and absolutely righteous (1:9), and he never changes (1:12). Seventeen times in the New Testament, Jesus is pictured as sitting at God's right hand, meaning, that his work at Calvary is complete.

Sometimes we get really discouraged as believers, but never give up. Jesus is better than anything that the world has to offer.

OCTOBER 18

Hebrews 2:1-9



THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE INTO COMPUTERS KNOW THAT SECURITY IS A CRITICAL ASPECT OF YOUR WORK.

We work hard at making sure that our personal info, credit info, are all secure. I have to admit that I have never gotten a virus using pen and paper. Just a thought.

Security: it's a word we use for our homes, it's what we desire for our families, and it's how we plan for ourselves financially. Interesting enough, security is one of the primary concepts found throughout Scripture, especially in the Hebrews. When we understand what he did for us on the cross, specifically his death, we then can understand how our salvation is secure in him.

"But we do see Jesus—made lower than the angels for a short time so that by God's grace he might taste death for everyone—crowned with glory and honor because of his suffering in death" (2:9).

Here are two things to understand about Christ's death:

1. *It was part of God's plan from the beginning.* Revelation 13:8 says that Jesus was slain before the foundation of the world.

2. *Christ took our place on the cross so that salvation was totally complete.* To taste death does not mean just to take a sip of it. It's actually a Hebrew metaphor that means to partake fully.

What that indicates is that Christ experienced all that death had. It would be impossible for anyone to have eternal life in Christ and then fall back into death because death no longer remains in the cup. Christ's *suffering of death* means that he took our sin upon himself – he bore our sin – he became our substitute. And now he serves as 2:10 *the source of our salvation*. Your salvation is secure because Christ is the One who secured it, provided it, and insures it.

OCTOBER 19

Hebrews 2:10-18



SEVERAL YEARS AGO, NEWSPAPER ARTICLES AROUND THE GLOBE HAILED THE ARRIVAL OF A SELF-PROCLAIMED SAVIOR WHO WAS CALLED THE SON OF GOD BY HIS FOLLOWERS.

It turns out he was a 13-year-old guru who took his place alongside the multitudes of people who have claimed messiahship. He joined the ranks of men like Theudas, who tried to split the waters of the Jordan and failed, and Simon Magus, who tried to prove himself by flying, unsuccessfully, off a building in Rome. False prophets and messiahs have come and gone.

Hebrews, however, gives us a very clear picture into the purpose of why Jesus became a man. The Bible teaches us that Jesus is absolutely God. If he is God, why would he become a man? The writer gives us three reasons.

1. *To establish a personal relationship with us.* 2:10 says that God “should make the source of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” The source is the word *pathfinder*. It means that Jesus blazed the trail alone in order to secure our entry into heaven.

2. *To defeat Satan and death completely.* 2:14 says “that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death – that is, the devil.”

3. *To help us when we are tempted.* 2:18 says “For since he himself was tested and has suffered, he is able to help those who are tested.”

Jesus understands the dilemmas we face in life. That’s why he came to earth. He identified with us, not to give us an excuse to sin, but to show us the way out. He satisfied God’s wrath toward sin so that we might experience his grace. Live in God’s grace today and look to Christ’s example for overcoming the temptations of life.

OCTOBER 20

Hebrews 3:1-19



MOST OF US GROWING UP HAD HEROES: GREAT ATHLETES, SUPERHEROES, PARENTS PERHAPS.

Hebrews admonishes us to *consider Jesus* (3:1). He is suggesting that we, instead of looking to the world, put our thoughts on Christ. From a Jewish standpoint, the Scripture is now comparing Jesus to the hero Moses, showing that Christ is even superior to the one who received the Law. The reason is simple. While Moses was faithful, his faithfulness pales in comparison to Jesus.

And that is why the writer then admonishes us to hold fast and not harden our hearts toward God. When you are going through a tough time in life, when your prayers seem to go unanswered, and when you struggle with the daily difficulties of work and family, it is easy to harden your heart toward God. That is when you must look back to Jesus. The people who received this letter were tempted to turn back time after time. In fact, Hebrews includes five warning passages about rebelling and turning our backs on God (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:14-29). How do we stay strong in times of great difficulty? Consider Jesus. Instead of looking at your problems and difficulties, remember who he is, and trust the fact that he is always faithful.

The Israelites, when they stood at Kadesh Barnea, refused to trust God because going into the Promised Land (which represents stepping into the will of God) seemed too difficult. There were giants in the land. The writer of Hebrews calls for us to “encourage each other daily” (3:13). It is easy to tear each other down. The way that we consistently stay strong in this land of giants is to trust God and to encourage one another to do the same. Make Jesus your hero.

OCTOBER 21

Hebrews 4:1-16



MANY RELIGIONS PROVIDE A PRIEST, ONE WHO IS THE “MEDIATOR” BETWEEN A DEITY AND HUMAN BEINGS.

In all religions, except one, the priest or even high priest was merely a human, sinful, frail, and in need of forgiveness. The one exception is Christ. He is identified as our Great High Priest. One of the reasons that we have a secure salvation is because he is the one who brings us to God.

Hebrews is filled with Jewish imagery. One of those incredible pictures it paints is found right here in 4:14: “A high priest who has passed through the heavens.” The imagery here looks back to an important day in the life of the Jews called the Day of Atonement. On that day, he offered a sacrifice for his own sins and also a separate one for the sins of the people. The blood of that sacrifice had to be carried into the inner sanctuary of the Temple known as the Holy of Holies. To do so required that the priest pass through three portals.

First, he bore the blood through the door into the outer court. Second, he entered another door into the Holy Place. And third, he entered through the veil of the Holy of Holies. Thus, the ancient high priest had a three-portaled entrance in coming before the thrice-holy God—and he had to do it year after year.

Jesus, as our great high priest, after his once-only sacrifice for sins on the cross, passed “through the heavens.” And there he sat down (something no high priest had ever done!) because his atoning work was finished. The reason your salvation is secure is because Christ paid the ultimate price and offered the only complete and perfect sacrifice necessary to provide forgiveness for your sins.

OCTOBER 22

Hebrews 5:1-14



A SECONDARY THEME IN HEBREWS, THAT IS VERY MUCH CONNECTED WITH THE ISSUE OF CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY, IS THE NEED FOR BELIEVERS TO GROW UP IN THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

Chapter 5 introduces us to the superiority of Christ as the perfect Priest. The key verse is verse 9, "After he was perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." The Jewish High Priest would not only offer sacrifices for the people but also for himself. The reason is because he himself was imperfect.

Jesus, however, is the perfect high priest. Please do not misunderstand verse 9. For Jesus to be *perfected* meant not that he became perfect by having his nature improved. He was eternally perfect in holiness, wisdom, knowledge, and righteousness. He became perfect in the sense that he completed the work necessary for becoming the eternal High Priest. In other words, through his sacrifice, he proved the eternal nature of his priesthood.

Therefore, we as believers need to stay focused on Jesus and continue to grow up in our lives. Even Jesus, as a man, learned obedience. It behooves us, then, to strive to be deeper spiritually. The immature Christian, according to 5:11-14, does not love to study God's Word, is unable to share God's Word, does not understand the deep truths of God's Word, and cannot use God's Word. Do not be that kind of Christian. Do not be guilty of thinking that the pastor's preaching is too deep or of being more passionate about your team's box score than you are God's Word. Let us be the kind of Christians who commit to grow up spiritually.

OCTOBER 23

Hebrews 6:1-20



ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT PARTS OF LIFE IS LEARNING TO TRUST, EVEN LEARNING TO TRUST GOD. SOME OF US STRUGGLE WITH THAT IDEA.

Hebrews introduces us to God's answer about trust. God tells us exactly why we can trust him in everything. Hebrews 6:19 says, "We have this hope as an anchor for our lives, safe and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain."

When a ship would come into a harbor, if the tide was low, the ship would be unable to pass across the sand bar that would be built to allow a natural harbor to exist. The ship would have to wait until the tide rose to enter the harbor.

In preparation, the ship's captain would send a small boat – a forerunner – with the ship's anchor onboard, because the small boat could cross the shallow waters of the sand bar and enter the harbor. Once arriving, the forerunner would drop the anchor in the harbor. When the tide began to rise, the ship would naturally be pulled across the sand bar into the harbor. Storms might come beforehand, but the ship was still safe because its anchor was in the harbor.

Christ is identified as being the forerunner. He has gone ahead of us. He has crossed the sand bar of death and has entered the safe harbor of heaven. When the tide rises, and it becomes time for you to cross that sand bar of death, you will naturally and easily cross over because your anchor is already in the harbor. Storms may rise out in this world while we wait for our salvation to be fulfilled, but your salvation is complete and secure because Christ, our Forerunner, holds our anchor and has safely placed it in the harbor of heaven.

OCTOBER 24

Hebrews 7:1-28



CAN A PERSON LIVE FOREVER? DO WE JUST LIVE, DIE, AND CEASE TO EXIST, OR IS THERE SOMETHING MORE?

In 1493, Ponce de Leon traveled with Christopher Columbus on his second trip to the Americas. Decades later, de Leon would make his own trips, traveling to what is now Puerto Rico, the Florida Keys, and Florida. The one thing associated most with de Leon is his supposed desire to find the fountain of youth. Historically, there's no real evidence that his motivation for traveling to Florida was to make that discovery, but the story makes for good discussion.

The claim of Christianity is that eternal life is possible and that we can have a salvation that does not end. The reason is because of who Jesus is and what he has done for us. You have to start with the fact that salvation is all about Jesus – it starts with him and ends with him, and therefore the salvation he offers is complete.

Look at 7:21, “The Lord has sworn, and he will not change his mind.” This characteristic of the nature of God has already been discussed in Hebrews, but here, the writer reminds us again of this important concept – immutability. *God does not change*. Literally, the text says that God will not be changed. He has declared that Christ's priesthood and his work are eternal and because of who God is and the nature of his character, he is not going to change his mind with regard to those two things.

In fact, in 7:22 we are told that Christ has become a guarantee of a better covenant. Christ is the collateral to show that our salvation will be paid in full. He promises *a better covenant*. And God won't change his mind about that fact!

OCTOBER 25

Hebrews 8:1-13



NEW AND IMPROVED ISN'T ALWAYS SO GREAT. REMEMBER "NEW COKE?"

I wonder if the Jews were thinking the same thing. Christ offers a New Covenant, but how is it better than the Old Covenant? For the Hebrew Christians going through persecution, maybe the old way is better than the new way. When living the Christian life gets difficult, what is it that Christ offers that reminds us to keep going?

Hebrews details the superiority of Christ against religious organizations and systems. In 8:1-6, he has a superior ministry as our High Priest. Now in 8:7, the writer returns to Christ's superiority in relation to the Law and the Old Testament covenant. Take careful note that the quotation is from Jeremiah 31:31-34. Jeremiah's prophecy regarded Israel's return to the Promised Land, but here you see how the text speaks of a greater thing even than that. The prophecy of Jeremiah is speaking of the coming of Christ – a promise of a new Covenant.

God says that, through Christ, he will be merciful to their wrongdoing, and I will never again remember their sins. Mercy is a word that means compassion to one in need or in helpless distress or debt. It is what God gives us because we are helpless and cannot fix the problems we have created because of our sin.

What Hebrews tells us is that the relationship we have with God is real. That is what Christ has done for us. Living the Christian life is worth it, with all of the costs, because Jesus brings us into a genuine relationship with God. You may be tempted today to give up and go back to your old ways, but do not do it. Jesus offers real relationship and real forgiveness. Whatever it is in your life, when you come to God through Christ, he forgives.

OCTOBER 26

Hebrews 9:1-28



THE WORD “PERFECT” IS, IN SO MANY CASES, OVERUSED.

We hear it especially in sports. He made that pass perfectly; he hit the ball perfectly; that was a perfect pitch. To be perfect, though, means to be without any fault or to be flawless. A perfect pass means that it results in a touchdown every time. A perfect golf shot means that it results in a hole-in-one every time. A perfect sacrifice would mean that it offers salvation and forgiveness completely. That is the sacrifice made by Christ. His sacrifice secures us because it is perfect.

Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. One of the great accusations against Christianity is the issue about blood. Many critics call Judaism and Christianity bloody religions because so much emphasis is on the shedding of blood.

Christianity is filled with blood, because the blood of Christ is spoken of as accomplishing for us the grand benefits that belong to salvation: We have been purchased by his blood (Acts 20:28). We have propitiation by his blood (Romans 3:25). We have been justified by his blood (Romans 5:9). We have redemption through his blood (Ephesians 1:7). We who were afar off have been brought near by his blood (Ephesians 2:13). We have peace through his blood (Colossians 1:20). Our consciences are purified by his blood (Hebrews 9:13). We are sanctified through his blood (Hebrews 13:12). We are ransomed by his blood (1 Peter 1:19). We have been set free from sin by his blood (Revelation 1:5). These and many other benefits remind us that the blood of Christ is central to all we are as a redeemed people. It should not be surprising then that, as recipients of God’s gracious salvation through the person and work of Christ, we preach, pray, and even sing of the wonderful power of the blood.

OCTOBER 27

Hebrews 10:1-25



IHAD A CONVERSATION RECENTLY WITH SEVERAL 20-SOMETHING YOUNG MEN. I ASKED HOW MANY OF THEM HAD DROPPED OUT OF CHURCH AFTER HIGH SCHOOL AND THEN WHAT BROUGHT THEM BACK.

One of the guys said that he left because he misunderstood Christianity as just a set of rules, and if he could not keep them, what was the point?

I have a feeling that a lot of people see Christianity and the Church in that light. Let's be honest, the Bible is filled with many admonishments for behavior, attitude, and expectations. What kind of faith would we have if it carried no demands on us? But what a frustrating faith it would be if God was asking us to do things that could never be accomplished. God would be a cruel God to expect things of us knowing that they could not be done. So he does not do that.

The interesting thing about being a Christian is that God does not expect anything of us for which he has not already provided what is necessary to meet that expectation. That is the understanding of the curtain being torn. Christ has provided the way for us to know God. Three times the writer of Hebrews says to us "let us," encouraging us to what we can do now that we know Christ.

What does God expect of you? It is really nothing outside of what he has already provided for you. Jesus died on the cross, and in doing so, he removed the barrier that separated us from God. We can now come into God's presence, we can live the Christian life faithfully, and we can encourage one another. So be what Christ has made you to be. Live out your faith. And do not give up.

OCTOBER 28

Hebrews 11:1-3



ONE OF THE MOST CRITICAL WORDS FOR US TO UNDERSTAND REGARDING BOTH SALVATION AND LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS THE WORD FAITH.

In Hebrews, the word is used only twice as a verb, but it is used 32 times as a noun, 24 times in Chapter 11. Hebrews 11:1-3 give us not only a definition of what faith is but also a description of what faith does and how it works: “Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen. For our ancestors won God’s approval by it. By faith we understand that the universe was created by God’s command, so that what is seen has been made from things that are not visible.”

Reality literally means to stand under or to support. Faith is to a Christian what a foundation is to a house. It gives confidence and assurance. *Hoped for* refers to the reward of the godly. *Proof* references conviction. Once something has been proven, it becomes a conviction of strongly held beliefs. Therefore, we believe that God created the universe by his simple utterance that it should exist. He created the world from nothing, not from something that appears or is visible.

We are often told that faith is a religious virtue or superstition that has no basis in fact for modern humanity. God, however, reminds us of the necessity of faith in the entire framework of our lives. We believe because we choose to believe God, and we choose to believe what God says. And when we do that, it then becomes our conviction.

OCTOBER 29

Hebrews 11:4-40



THE POINT OF THIS PASSAGE IS TO ENCOURAGE YOU NOT TO GIVE UP WHEN YOU FACE TRIAL, DIFFICULTY, AND EVEN DEATH.

We are reminded of many of the heroes of the faith including Enoch, Abraham, and Moses. The point of the final part of the chapter is to help us understand that faith does not always lead to an untested or easy life. One of the striking emphases is the list from Gideon to David. These were men who exhibited faith and were used of God even after they had experienced doubt and failure in their lives.

Others are mentioned, not by name in particular, who experienced the victory of the Lord. They subdued kingdoms, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, and were made strong out of weakness. They still went through the trials of life, but they learned victory through trial, not by avoiding it.

Still others did not find complete freedom from the troubles of life and the consequences that accompany those difficulties. There were those moments that they literally had to die for the cause of their faith and refused to deny their Creator because they knew that an eternal deliverance awaited them.

Living the Christian life is easy when we receive the victory even in spite of our failures. It is tolerable when God gives us victory through our trials. Many of us, though, do not understand the third category of suffering to the point of death. The Prosperity Gospel preachers certainly do not believe that Christians suffer – but Christians do.

Remember that the ultimate victory is in Christ and in the eternal life that he offers. Let's all strive to follow the example of the heroes of the faith.

OCTOBER 30

Hebrews 12:1-13



A MAJOR PART OF LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS STAYING STRONG IN THE FAITH, REGARDLESS OF THE OBSTACLES.

We face obstacles in our spiritual lives – whether temptation, people, troubles, or crisis. They are all there, all of the time. So how do we press on? That’s where Jesus comes in. Because of what he has done, he not only provides the security of our faith but also the endurance needed for our faith.

What Hebrews encourages us to do is to keep our eyes on Jesus because he is the source and perfecter of our faith.

Those two words are rich in meaning. *Source* – some translations will say *author*. It is a word that means pioneer or originator. He is the one who begins the race and takes the lead. What the Bible is saying is that Jesus is the one who is the source of our faith – all faith begins in him but that he also is the example for faith.

- Tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15)
- Temptation in the wilderness, yet he resisted (Matthew 4)
- Asked, “let this cup pass,” but went to the cross. (Matthew 26)

To be the *Perfecter* means that he brings faith to its completion. He does so both by his own example and by the fact that he brings us to this point.

- He was obedient to the point of death. (Philippians 2:8)
- It is finished. (John 19:30)
- He sat down at the right hand of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

Everything that is necessary for you to live the Christian life is made possible – not by what you do – but what Christ has done.

OCTOBER 31

Hebrews 13:1-25



IN 1937, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER WROTE, “WHEN CHRIST CALLS A MAN, HE BIDS HIM COME AND DIE.”

Little did he know how true those words were. In 1943, he was imprisoned by the Nazis. On April 9, 1945, shortly before his concentration camp was liberated, Bonhoeffer was executed for his stand as a Christian against Hitler.

The book that Bonhoeffer wrote that included those words was entitled “The Cost of Discipleship.” In it, he attacked what he called *cheap grace*, a watered-down version of Christianity that includes the preaching of forgiveness without repentance, grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, and grace without Christ, living and incarnate.

That is the concern of this final chapter of Hebrews. It is not just enough to say that we are saved; our words must be backed with action. Hebrews, then, details the areas of compassion, marital fidelity, contentment, discipleship, distinctiveness, and sacrificial worship through prayer, genuineness, praise, and Christian living as evidences that point to the genuineness of a person’s faith. While we are not saved by works, we are certainly called to live a life worthy of our faith.

Here is a great example. During the early years of the Christian faith, Pliny the Younger was sent to find fault with the Christians so that they might be charged and executed. His report to Trajan the Roman emperor said, “They bind themselves by an oath not to any criminal end, but to avoid theft and robbery or adultery, never to break their word or repudiate a deposit when called on to refund it.” They lived exemplary, moral lives. The world may scoff at us, but one way that we repudiate their charges is by living out what we believe. That is what genuine faith does. It lives itself out in our actions.

NOVEMBER 1

James 1:1-12



CHARLES SHULTZ, THE CREATOR OF THE CHARLIE BROWN COMIC STRIPS, WROTE A COMIC STRIP IN WHICH CHARLIE BROWN SAID THE FOLLOWING, “I THINK I’M AFRAID OF BEING HAPPY... BECAUSE WHENEVER YOU GET TOO HAPPY SOMETHING BAD ALWAYS HAPPENS.”

Too often today many of us adopt a mindset like Charlie Brown. We are afraid to allow ourselves to be joyous because we are waiting for something bad to happen. James starts his epistle by telling us that bad things are going to happen in life, but when the things happen we cannot allow them to steal our joy. James continues his thought by explaining that the trials that we face in life build steadfastness or patience. That patience once it has reached full effect will allow us to be “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (1:4). The trials that we face daily can be numerous, whether they be difficulties, doubts, temptations, or enticements to sin. Unfortunately most of these trials we encounter will not phone ahead to see if it is a convenient time. Their sudden presence in our lives demands that we be prepared mentally, physically, and especially spiritually. James challenges us to change our perspective and not dwell on the negative, but instead focus upon the positive. The apostle John wrote, “Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Father, guide us today with your presence and allow us to be joyful regardless of the situations around us. Today, Father, let us reflect on your greatness, majesty, and splendor and allow the joy of our salvation to put a smile on our face.

NOVEMBER 2

James:1:13-21



FLIP WILSON HAD A COMEDY ROUTINE WHERE HE DISCUSSED HIS BAD DECISIONS AND SAID AFTER EACH ONE, “THE DEVIL MADE ME DO IT.”

Satan does tempt believers (Matthew 4), but he does not make us do anything, we have to give into the temptation. To clarify this, we choose to sin. James speaks about dealing with temptation and says that we are not to blame God when we are tempted, but he reminds us that when we give in to temptation it is because of our own desire (1:13-14). James then reminds his readers that all good things come from God. God is not involved in the evil that is committed when we chose to sin, but he is the source of our ability to resist temptation and sin. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” Temptation is something that each one us will face daily, but thankfully it is something that the Lord has given us his strength to overcome.

Father, lead us today with your Spirit of peace and truth. Today let me be a better representation of your grace and mercy upon this world. Today help me to choose to love my neighbor rather than the sinful desires of my heart. Today as I interact with the world help me to put away all filthiness and receive your meekness. Help me to stand upon your Word, which is able to save souls.

NOVEMBER 3

James 1:22-27



JAMES 1:22 “BUT BE DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT HEARERS ONLY, DECEIVING YOURSELVES,” REPRESENTS THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM THAT HE IS ADDRESSING WITH HIS EPISTLE.

Listening to the Word without actively applying it to your life is dangerous and self-deceiving. The Apostle Paul states a very similar idea, “For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.” (Romans 2:13) This is a fundamental truth that we all must understand, our faith must be demonstrated. This does not mean to actively attempt to get recognition for our faith, but rather to simply look for those in need around us and find ways to help, encourage, or uplift them through prayer. Kurt Richardson, a famous author says, “Genuine religion means that everything in the believer’s life is to bear the mark of service to God.” This summarizes the last verse of Chapter 1 which reminds us to “keep oneself unstained from the world.” (1:27) We must remember to allow Jesus to be the one who leaves a mark on our lives and not the world.

Father, today we ask that we become doers of the word, which requires us to meditate on and study your word. We pray today that you help us to remember your word which we have hidden in our hearts. Remind us of your commandments and help us to become people who live their lives for you. Guide our steps, actions, thoughts, and words today. Help us to be obedient to your calling in our lives, and most of all help us to lead lives that demonstrate your grace and forgiveness. Allow this world when they look upon us to see a reflection of you.

NOVEMBER 4

James 2:1-7



WHEN WE SHOW PREFERENCES TOWARDS OTHERS JAMES EQUALS THAT WITH BEING JUDGES WITH EVIL THOUGHTS TOWARDS OTHERS. (2:4)

James opens with a direct command to “show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.” (2:1) He then gives us an example of a rich man and poor man coming into the church and the rich man being given preferential treatment while the poor man is made to stand off to the side. James reminds us that we are to show no partiality towards our fellow man, regardless of their economic status or their race, sex, or religious leaning. These distinctions that we create between people only create divisions and animosity towards others. We must remember to look upon each person not based on their outward appearance or their status in the community, but we must look at them as the Lord looks at them. 1 Samuel 16:7b says “For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” We must remember that it is not our duty to judge or to show preferential treatment to others, our duty is to show the Lord’s love to all those that we encounter. John 13:34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”

Father today we ask that you help us to see the world as you see it, to look upon people as you see them. We pray today Lord that you mold and shape us into your image today and help us to show others your amazing love and amazing grace.

NOVEMBER 5

James 2:8-13



TO FULFILL SOMETHING IS TO COMPLETE IT IN ITS ENTIRETY OR TO PAY WHAT ONE IS UNDER OBLIGATION TO PAY.

“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well” (2:8). Today James is offering us an antidote to the inappropriate thinking that we found in previous verses concerning the preferential treatment of others. He calls us to love others as we love ourselves. But notice that James said that we must really fulfill the law. This is not something that we can do half-heartedly or only when the time is right. We have not been called to love some of our neighbors, or to share the gospel with some of the people. We have been called to love all of our neighbors and to share the gospel with all of the people. A former pastor and dear friend of mine used to tell me, “All means all and that’s all it means.” James then continues his examination of the royal law and tells the reader that “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (2:10). These are somber words for us, for each of us has violated one part of God’s commandments at some point in our lives. However there is hope, and that is found in God’s mercy towards us. Mercy triumphs over judgment (2:13). Even though we deserve severe judgment upon our lives, we are forgiven by Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and we can rejoice that mercy triumphs over judgment.

Father, today we ask that you help us to see your mercy and help show your mercy that was found on the cross to all that we meet today.

NOVEMBER 6

James 2:14-26



MY WIFE AND I RECENTLY DECIDED TO PLANT A GARDEN IN OUR BACK YARD TO ALLOW OUR SMALL CHILDREN TO SEE HOW FRUITS AND VEGETABLES GROW.

We each decided to pick one of our favorite fruits and vegetables to plant. My son chose watermelon and was very excited as we placed the vine in the garden and gave it some fertilizer and water. My son runs out and checks on his watermelon plant almost every day and he cannot wait to taste the watermelon that he grew himself. There are two components to our faith, the actual faith itself which is like the vine of the watermelon plant, and our works which is the actual fruit that the vine produces. Both are needed for the fruit to be produced to its fullest. If a watermelon does not grow and become edible, you do not examine the fruit, but you look at the vine and see if some parasite or disease is affecting it. We must be very careful and look at our faith and its works daily, just as my son does when he goes to the garden and checks on his watermelon vines. It is easier to remove some small parasite or disease in its earliest stages before it critically damages the vine. We must make sure that our faith is built upon the leading of the Holy Spirit and aligns itself with the Word of God in order for it to produce the sweetest fruit. “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead” (2:26).

Father, today we ask you to help us to be fruit inspectors, to examine our lives and see if there is any sickness or parasites that are damaging our faith or destroying our fruit.

NOVEMBER 7

James 3:1-12



HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU THOUGHT, I WISH I DID NOT SAY THAT? FAR TOO OFTEN WE SAY SOMETHING IN ANGER OR FRUSTRATION THAT IS HURTFUL AND WE WISH WE COULD TAKE IT BACK.

James examines our tongue and compares it to a fire. “And 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” (3:6). I don’t know about you, but those last five words sent shivers down my back as I read them. Set on fire by hell, it is quite scary to think that a part of our body is not only a source of evil within our bodies, but that it gets its fuel directly from a pit of darkness that was created for all of the demons in the universe. James reminds us that we will never be able to tame our tongues, but he encourages us to examine the words that we speak and see if they are fresh or bitter water (3:10-11). Jesus stated something very similar in Mark 7:15, saying, “There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.” We must remember to choose our words carefully and not allow ourselves to be controlled by our tongues.

Father, today we ask that you give us your words to speak, we ask for you to control our tongues for we are not able, we ask that every word that is spoken today brings you all the glory and honor that you are due.

NOVEMBER 8

James 3:13-18



JOHAN MACARTHUR ONCE SAID THAT HE WAS “WORKING REAL HARD TO BE STUPID.”

He was discussing how he was reading the Bible and he realized that he could not remember what he had read three or four days ago, it had faded from his memory. Many of us can relate to that feeling, I personally struggle to remember what I read that morning at times. The Bible is fully equipped with God’s wisdom, but we must remember what we read and make it a part of our daily lives. If we are simply reading the Bible to say that we read the Bible today, then it is a futile exercise. However if we are reading our Bible everyday so that we can grow closer into an image of Jesus, then it is time well spent. “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple” (Psalm 19:7). A different translation translates the last section as “his teachings last forever, and they give wisdom to ordinary people” (CEV). The Bible is the wisdom that is from above and it is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere” (3:17). This wisdom is not for select individuals but for each and every one of us today. Today let’s truly allow God’s word to impact our lives and allow his wisdom to lead us everywhere we go.

Father, today let us reflect on your word, let us remember your teachings, and remind us to not seek worldly wisdom but to always seek your divine wisdom first.

NOVEMBER 9

James 4:1-6



IREMEMBER THE FIRST TIME AN ARGUMENT BROKE OUT AT A CHURCH BUSINESS MEETING. FOR THE LIFE OF ME I CANNOT REMEMBER WHAT THE FIGHT WAS ABOUT, BUT I CLEARLY REMEMBER THE ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS OF MANY OF THE “MATURE” CHRISTIANS.

I asked the pastor later if all the business meetings went like that, he smiled and said not every time but they occasionally get that spicy. James addresses Christian infighting in Chapter 4 by looking at the root of the problem. He states that the external behavior of a believer is a direct reflection of the inner condition of that believer. This inner condition causes us to lash out angrily at others, it causes us to fight and to war with each other, and it causes us to damage our fellowship with other believers. God would rather us to humble ourselves. Micah 6:8 tells us, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” In order for us to walk humbly with God, we must calm the inner turmoil that rages inside of us, we must seek peaceful solutions with others when we have a disagreement, and we must put aside our selfish pride before it causes us to stumble. Martin Luther once wrote, “God creates out of nothing. Therefore until a man is nothing, God can make nothing out of him.”

Father, today we ask you to help us to humble our hearts and seek after your grace. We ask that you quiet our minds and calm our hearts and to seek the increase of all those around us rather than just ourselves. We ask you to fill us with your goodness so that it will overflow into this world.

NOVEMBER 10

James 4:6-10



JAMES REFERS TO HIS READERS AS DOUBLE-MINDED IN VERSE 8. WHAT EXACTLY MADE THEM DOUBLE-MINDED?

They wanted both God and the world. They wanted to have all sinful pleasures of the world, the acceptance of the world, to fit into the world, all while maintaining a relationship with God. This creates a turmoil in our lives that has severe consequences for us if left unchecked. James gives us an antidote for this turmoil. He tells us to submit to God unconditionally (4:7), draw near to God, (4:8) and humble ourselves before God (4:10). All of this is easier said than done, but it is not impossible. The process that James is speaking of is not one that can be mastered overnight; it is one that must be worked at each and every day. A friend of mine decided to get into shape and he set the goal of running a half marathon in one year's time. He did not immediately go out and start running 13 miles a day, he started slow. He began running two miles a day, after a month he increased to three. Each month he increased his distance he ran and eventually within a year's time his body and mind was accustomed to running long distances. We battle our double-mindedness in the same way. We set a goal and we slowly move towards that goal. The closer we get to the goal the further our old position gets from us. As we draw nearer to God, he will draw nearer to us and we will leave the desires of this sinful world behind us.

Father, help us today to lament and mourn over our double-mindedness. Today, Lord, we ask that you help us to put everything into the right perspective, with you in the forefront of our thoughts, words, and actions.

NOVEMBER 11

James 4:11-17



SPEAKING EVIL ABOUT ANOTHER PERSON HAS BECOME A STANDARD IN MANY REALITY-BASED TELEVISION SHOWS TODAY.

There are numerous shows devoted to examining the fashion of celebrities and making comments about the choice in clothes. There are programs on television that consist of people sitting around speaking about others and voicing their opinion about people. It is easy to criticize others, it is easy to sit on the sidelines and speak rude comments about those on the field, it is easy to complain about the cars that are driving around us. The Bible tells us that we are not to speak evil of others and that when we do we are judging that individual (4:11). James goes a step further with that thought and asks a very poignant question, But who are you to judge your neighbor (4:12)? We must remember that everyone has flaws that they are working on, and it is not our job to judge them for those flaws. When my wife and I started attending church we were very judgmental of others, it was a trait that we did not want. One particular Sunday the pastor preached a message on Matthew 7:3, “You can see the speck in your friend’s eye, but you don’t notice the log in your own eye.” We decided to help each other with our problem and any time we judged someone else, we would simply look at the other one and say “Log!” After a month we noticed that we stopped judging others and started to look more compassionately towards people and their predicaments. Today let’s start to help others rather than judging them.

Father, you are the ultimate judge of this universe. I am not qualified to judge others. Help me to remember who I am in your sight and to look at others as you see them.

NOVEMBER 12

James 5:1-6



THE BIBLE HAS MANY WARNINGS AGAINST BELIEVERS PURSUING WEALTH AND JAMES HAS A VERY SIMILAR MESSAGE FOR US TODAY.

In Matthew 6:24 it says, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” This is a very strict warning that is given to us to make sure that we do not allow the accumulation of wealth to become the driving force of our lives. The driving force of our lives should be Jesus. We also must remember that money is not evil; however it is the love of money that is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). Money can be used for many wondrous things: feeding the hungry, getting school supplies for needy children, keeping the electric running at the local homeless shelter. All of those items take money and it takes charitable giving to accomplish those goals. However we must remember that charitable giving without an honest and humble intention is just as dangerous. Matthew 6:2-4 warns us “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Father, today create in us charitable hearts that do not seek recognition for our charitable giving, but rather ones that look for opportunities to demonstrate to others your mercy and your helping hands.

NOVEMBER 13

James 5:7-12



A GOOD FRIEND OF MINE WHO IS MY SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER HAS A JOKE ABOUT PATIENCE THAT HE USES WHEN HE TEACHES.

He jokingly says, “Lord give me patience and give it to me now.” He uses this to demonstrate that we often lack patience in the times when we need it the most. James starts off verse 7 by telling his readers to “be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.” James knows that patience is something that many of us struggle with and he provides us with three examples to encourage us: the farmer who is waiting on his crops, the prophets who spoke to Israel in years past, and Job. There is no better example in the Bible of suffering than Job, however through everything that happened to Job, he never forsook his faith in God. That is what produces patience. Patience is not something that can be learned from reading a book or from taking a class. It is something that can be only gained through persistent practice. James gives us some pointers to remember while we learn how to be patient. The first is do not grumble (5:9) For me personally I lose my patience when I am stuck in a traffic jam, I often find myself grumbling or complaining about how late I am going to be. We must remember that these small little inconveniences are there to build up our patience and help us to gain this wonderful godly attribute. “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant” (1 Corinthians 13:4).

Father, today help me to become more patient and help me to grow even closer towards the perfection of your love.

NOVEMBER 14

James 5:13-20



P RAYER IS ONE OF THE MOST AMAZING GIFTS THAT WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN BY GOD.

We were given a direct line to him that can be used any time of the day and with no connection charges. But unfortunately it is one of the biggest weaknesses within the average church today. In his book *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, Thom Rainer, after examining all of the items that lead churches to close their doors, offers the following conclusion, No Prayer, No Hope. The lack of prayer led to the lack of hope and this is what caused the various churches examined by Thom Rainer to decline and eventually close. Today the final section of James reminds us of the importance of prayers and tells us that “the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (5:16). There is peace found in prayer, there is compassion found in prayer, there is wisdom found in prayer, and most importantly forgiveness found in prayer. Jesus knew the importance of prayer and is recorded numerous times in the gospels to be found praying. Probably the most memorable occurrence was his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus went to pray and when he returned he found the disciples sleeping and he said to them, “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” (Matt 26:40-41).

Today spend some time praying for your pastor and other leaders of the church. Pray that hope never leaves the halls of the church and that the doors remain open so that the good news of the gospel can be proclaimed to a world that desperately needs to hear it.

NOVEMBER 15

James 4:7



JAMES WROTE HIS EPISTLE AND DECIDED TO NOT FOCUS ON PROCLAMATION OF JESUS' NAME, BUT RATHER THE APPLICATION OF CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES IN THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF CHRISTIAN BELIEVERS.

The book of James is a unique epistle of the Bible. It addresses some of the biggest stumbling blocks for Christians, however it does not speak directly about Jesus and the atoning sacrifice that he made on the cross. James wrote his epistle to help the church of his day to become a church that moved beyond mere words and become one whose actions glorified God. This is something that is still needed for us today. "Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). James is a book that is a call to action in our lives today. The victorious Christian life is one that is lived in full display for others to see. Our actions should bring honor and glory to God and should allow others to see the Holy Spirit's influence upon us. We will face temptations every day but God has given us the ability to overcome those temptations and to not act upon them. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). If you want to experience victory over temptation, submit yourselves to God. Grow in your Bible knowledge, build a stronger relationship with Christ, and put into practice the things that you have learned.

Father, today we ask that you guide our steps as we walk through this world, allow us to be a better image of you for others to see. Allow your light to shine through us today to help this dark world see you, our Savior.

NOVEMBER 16

1 Peter 1:1-2



AS THIS WONDERFUL LETTER BEGINS, WE CAN PICTURE THE OLD FISHERMAN HIMSELF.

Aged and worn, Peter tearfully addresses and shares the intent of his letter to people who were not at home in this world. The important thing for us to know is that they were going through a time of suffering and persecution. At least 15 times in this letter, Peter referred to suffering. Some of these Christians were suffering because they were living godly lives and doing what was good and right. Peter wrote to encourage them to be good witnesses to their persecutors, and to remember that their suffering would lead to glory.

Recently on a mission trip to a third world country that took two days of constant travel to get there from West Virginia, something dawned on me as I laid down that evening to sleep. I was not home and could not get home from where I was, even if I wanted to. The thought occurred to me for the first time in my life that I could not get home. I had never been to a place that I could not go home. It truly made me homesick.

To these who were homesick for heaven, Peter calls them “strangers” (1:1), which means resident aliens or sojourners. They were “called out” and “set apart” by a sovereign God for ministry. The great comfort for these people who were citizens of heaven through faith in Christ was that they were not permanent residents on earth. They were not home yet. They were in the world, but not of the world (John 17:16). No matter where we find ourselves as Christians, remember that we are not home in this world, but we are only one breath away from being home forever in heaven.

NOVEMBER 17

1 Peter 1:3-12



SIGNIFICANTLY, BEFORE PETER CONTINUES HIS LETTER, HE RISES TO PRONOUNCE A BLESSING ON GOD.

Peter doesn't immediately write about difficult circumstances. Neither does he tell them how to conduct themselves while living in an evil world. He calls upon readers to make a decided and determined prayer of praise. He describes the incomparable possessions we have in that abiding relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

First, we can rejoice because we have a "living hope." Believers in Jesus Christ have been "born again" to a living hope because of Christ's resurrection from the dead. Second, we can rejoice in suffering because we have a permanent inheritance. Your heavenly reservations are purchased by the blood of Christ and confirmed by his glorious resurrection. Third, we can rejoice in suffering because we "are protected by the power of God." No matter how severe the persecution, you and I will never get lost in the process. God's hand of comfort and strength will remain with us. God is in control and he is all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing. Fourth, we can rejoice in the midst of trials because they produce a growing, strengthening faith. Christians can rejoice through times of suffering because we have confidence in the unseen power of Christ. We see Christ most clearly in times of trial.

Finally, we can rejoice in suffering because the salvation of our souls is guaranteed. God has the power to save us physically through trials; but even when our bodies eventually succumb to death, our souls are faithfully delivered, just as promised. What a marvelous salvation! It not only guarantees an inheritance for us in the future, but also provides inexplicable faith, hope, and joy in the present.

NOVEMBER 18

1 Peter 1:13-21



THROUGHOUT HISTORY CHRISTIANS HAVE RESPONDED TO THE QUESTION OF “HOW CAN I LIVE A HOLY LIFE?” WITH ALL SORTS OF EXTREMES.

Some have adopted a hermit mentality of hiding in caves and living in solitude. Others have modeled a monk mentality of dwelling only with believers in a close-knit community and away from the world’s reach. Each approach falls under the idea of sanctification by isolation or withdrawing from the world to keep it from rubbing off on them.

Instead of isolation, the old fisherman calls for *insulation*. He tells them to make a difference in the world by being *different* in the world. Peter wants us to set our hope on the grace that is to be brought to us at the revelation of Christ.

He has shown us the two distinguishing marks of those who are doing so are a healthy mind and a holy life. Believers have a mission to accomplish and we can’t afford to lock ourselves outside of the world. Our salvation is all of God. He planned it, he accomplished it through the sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ, and he sovereignly has given it to us. Our faith and hope are in God. Human traditions and idolatrous religions offer nothing. Hope can be found only with faith in God who raised Christ from the dead.

This was Peter’s own experience as he saw first the empty tomb and then the living Lord. This is why Peter challenges us to be different from our depraved society without running or hiding from it.

NOVEMBER 19

1 Peter 1:22-2:3



ON THE NIGHT CHRIST INSTITUTED THE LORD'S SUPPER, HE TOLD HIS DISCIPLES, "BY THIS ALL MEN WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER" (JOHN 13:35).

Sadly, we are not always known for our love and support for one another. Instead of being loyal and fiercely committed to each other, we tend to look for ways to tear down rather than build up.

Peter calls his readers not to do that. Though scattered by persecution and attacked on all fronts, they need to pull together and find strength in each other's company. Believers in God are redeemed from their empty and guilty past; they are bound to their Lord and to one another. Growth in holiness produces devotion to God and love of the brethren. Peter therefore exhorts Christians to love one another.

Peter offers some vital thoughts on unity and growth within the body. Some felt tempted to conform, compromise, or give up altogether. But that wise old fisherman and apostle tells them that life is very short and prescribes an easily overlooked remedy for the disease of discouragement and despair: the truth and love of God.

The evils from which Christians have been converted are the very opposite of the determined love that Peter has pressed upon them. Peter first mentions evil in a general sense. Then he lists deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and defamation. Those are easily identified as poisons in life! Yet Christians have been delivered from those things by the power of the gospel and have cast them away. Christians can and will grow. The same truth of God that gave them birth also nourishes them. Christians must desire the Word.

NOVEMBER 20

1 Peter 2:4-25



PETER NOW BEGINS TO PAINT VITAL PICTURES TO ENCOURAGE HIS READERS TO BE FAITHFUL.

We know that Christ is the living stone, a precious cornerstone, and that those who reject him are bound to trip and fall. But what about those who believe in him? He calls them “living stones” who are “being built up as a spiritual house.” Christ is in the process of building his church, with those dead stones dug from the pit of sin, brought to life as “living stones,” and then fit into his glorious structure. Each time someone trusts Christ as savior, another stone gets placed into that living, growing church.

You represent a vital part of God’s plan. Never underestimate your important part in the community of Christ. Not only are we living stones in God’s spiritual house, but we are “a holy priesthood” called “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Your commitment to abstain from the impulses and desires of the flesh is based upon your true identity in Christ. Your true identity is anchored in heaven. Its pull upon you should be irresistible. You don’t belong to this world anymore. We are to be a people who fill our lives with good things. This action is manifested in submission.

For people in our day, this is startling. It is as counter cultural as one can get. Yet, for Peter, the good and honorable work of the Christian is nothing if it is not submission to authority. Submission defines the Christian’s ways because “being like the Savior” describes the Christian. Peter wants us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We are not to answer sin with sin. Christians willingly submit themselves to people in authority because we desire our lives to be pleasing to Jesus alone!

NOVEMBER 21

1 Peter 3:1-7



PETER NOW GETS VERY PERSONAL WITH HIS ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE CHURCH.

A wedding is one thing; a marriage is something completely different. Having been married many years, to a beautiful, amazing woman, I have moved from being an idealist to a realist. Our decades of marriage have been years of learning and growth. These experiences have made our marriage stronger.

Peter was a married man. In fact, his wife accompanied him on many of his travels (1 Corinthians 9:5). Peter knew firsthand the struggles of all married couples. Peter's focus on Christian marriage is set in the midst of believers living in a hopeless and hostile world. Peter looks to Jesus, through whom we can have hope in hurtful times. The context of marital harmony has to do with the ability to live in an unfair and even unbearable situation. Almost all marriages go through recurring periods that are difficult to bear. Peter addresses this kind of marital struggle, offering hope through following the example of the godly.

Peter uses Sarah, the wife of Abraham, as an example of submission and harmony. Sarah was someone who demonstrated a "gentle and quiet spirit," but she was not what we would call a wallflower. She was a strong and real woman. The Scriptures portray her faith and life as precious and beautiful.

Peter then reminds husbands that their wives are fellow heirs with them of the grace of life. They are equal partners and partakers of the glory that is to be revealed on the last day. As such, they should be treated with respect and dignity. A man's motivation for careful stewardship of marriage is found at the end of verse 7, "so that your prayers may not be hindered."

NOVEMBER 22

1 Peter 3:8-17



HAVING FINISHED HIS DEMANDING SECTION ON THE DIFFICULT WORK OF SUBMISSION, PETER IS AWARE THAT HIS READERS WILL NEED ENCOURAGEMENT.

Peter encourages Christians to get on with the difficult work of gracious living. He knows his readers will need strength if they are to battle with the world week after week. To accomplish this goal Peter exhorts them to be a blessing.

Peter explains that our ability to continue living graciously rests in a proper understanding of our calling, and our calling is to be a blessing. Peter names five characteristics of the life that brings blessing: like-mindedness, sympathy, brotherly love, compassion, and humility. These are not virtues chosen at random. These characteristics reflect the grace, love, and compassion of Jesus Christ.

There are two results that come from being a blessing. The first is a life that gives opportunities for God's people to make a defense for the hope that is in them. We will have plenty of opportunities to speak about Christ. The second is an opportunity to explain why we are suffering. People will be wondering how we patiently endure pain. When asked, we can explain the reason for the hope that is in us. With all gentleness and respect, we can tell others that we are looking for God to raise us up in his good time. We don't expect to receive any better treatment than Jesus received.

The result of our obedience is the reward we will receive in the last day. God will vindicate us on that day. Leave room for God's judgment. Endure and be encouraged. You have been called to be a blessing.

NOVEMBER 23

1 Peter 3:18-22



THIS IS A DIFFICULT PASSAGE. WE KNOW JESUS WAS VICTORIOUS AND COMPLETELY VINDICATED. READERS ARE ENCOURAGED WITH THE CERTAIN AND FIXED TRUTH THAT IN THE END THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST WILL WIN.

What, then, did Jesus do on the Saturday between his death and resurrection?

Peter tells us that Jesus “made proclamation to the spirits now in prison” (3:19). Who are the spirits he mentions? Peter says these were the spirits of those who were once disobedient in the days of Noah (3:20). In fact, Peter’s language and narrative reflect a common understanding among Jews and early Christians, based on a normal reading of Genesis 6:1–4. According to that account, prior to the flood of Noah, fallen angels (demons) sinned gravely by cohabiting with human women. When Peter wrote that Noah and his family were “saved by water,” he was careful to explain that this illustration does not imply salvation by baptism. Baptism is a picture of that which does save us, “the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (3:21). The body placed in water, cannot remove the stains of sin. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can do that (1 John 1:7–2:2).

The point Peter is making is that suffering can be one’s greatest triumph. The main thrust of the text is the faithful will get through the waters of this life. Indeed, like the eight who survived God’s judgment back then, everyone in Christ shall be left standing on the last day. Be encouraged with Christ’s victory. We who are living during these last days know we shall be vindicated for staying the course. Christ was vindicated, and you shall be too. Christ is victorious and so are you.

NOVEMBER 24

1 Peter 4:1-11



THROUGHOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT WE READ OF THE CHANGED LIFE THAT FOLLOWS GENUINE CONVERSION.

When God freely and fully forgives the sins of our former life, when the righteousness of Christ is credited to our account, and the Spirit of God takes up residence in our hearts, the old things pass away and all things become new (2 Corinthians 5:17). Peter's point is clear. Christ has not sent us into the world as spectators but as participators of God's grace.

We need to arm ourselves with spiritual armor to withstand the temptations of this world (Ephesians 6:10–18). Peter says if you have been conformed to Christ's death and resurrection, then the power of sin has been broken (4:1). He gives us four reminders of our new condition that will help us arm ourselves with the righteousness necessary to fight well against temptation and sin during our time in this hostile world: We no longer serve sin as our master (4:1), we don't spend our days overwhelmed by desires (4:2a), we have opened the door to the will of God (4:2b), and we have closed the door on sinful living (4:3).

Peter's life consisted of practical things such as boats, nets, fish, hard work, family, and the real life. We shouldn't be surprised to discover his direct mindset in his writing. He says to love, be kind, and minister. Truth was meant to be lived, not simply talked about and then ignored. When Peter took up his pen to write a letter to suffering saints, he went straight to the basics. Urgency led to simplicity. He didn't get bogged down speculating about the hows, whens, and wheres of the end times, but he focused instead on the question, "How does it help me today?" He answered this bottom-line question by commanding the church to glorify Christ.

NOVEMBER 25

1 Peter 4:12-19



PETER WANTS US TO SEE THAT SEASONS OF DIFFICULTY ARE UNIQUE TIMES WHEN GOD'S SMILE AND APPROVAL ARE ESPECIALLY ON US.

Peter wrote his letter to Christians who faced desperate circumstances. He revisits the truth of hope and pain, two competing realities working together toward a great climax. Peter comforts his readers in the midst of their fiery ordeal. He reminds them not to be surprised at their difficult circumstances (4:12). Instead, they are exhorted to keep rejoicing (4:13), entrust their lives to God (4:19), and cast their worries on him (5:7). Peter encourages all of us to focus on God's grace, to rejoice, and turn our attention toward a firm hope through faith.

So, in this grand finale of a great symphony of hope, we see Christ himself as the composer and conductor of our lives, our sure foundation of hope in hurtful times. Take heart! If God is putting you through a season of suffering, he has a desire for abundance in your future. If you are still discouraged, read what Peter says about unbelievers and sinners. If sitting under God's judgment is difficult for us now, what will it be like for unbelievers when they stand before God at his return? Trust God. He knows what is best for you. Like Spurgeon, learn to say, "I have learned to kiss the wave that strikes me against the Rock of Ages."

"Do not be surprised as though something strange were happening to you" (4:12). Many of us struggle with God during times of trials. We wonder where he has gone. We wonder if he still cares for us. We feel abandoned in our hour of need. The exalted truth in our time of testing is that God's glory is resting on us. He is guarding and guiding us. Be encouraged!

NOVEMBER 26

1 Peter 5:1-4



THOSE WHO LEAD AND THOSE WHO ARE LED SHOULD SHOW HUMILITY. IN THE FIRES OF TRIAL, THE SHEPHERD'S LEADERSHIP GAINS IMPORTANCE.

Peter is Christ's apostle, called to be a shepherd of the flock of the Lord, but his ministry will soon be over. He addresses those who must continue to feed and guard the flock. They are fellow elders called by the Lord to exercise oversight in his church. They have received the witness of the apostles and with them they confess Jesus Christ.

The image of the flock is often used in the Bible and it is a very instructive one. Sheep tend to flock together and God's people need to be together. Sheep are notoriously ignorant and prone to wander away if they do not follow the shepherd. Sheep are defenseless and need their shepherd's protection (Psalm 23). Sheep are very useful animals. God's people should be useful to him and certainly ought to "reproduce" themselves by bringing others to Christ. Sheep were used for the sacrifices and we ought to be "living sacrifices," doing the will of God (Romans 12:1-2).

With regard to the role of leaders in the church, Peter points out two effective principles: pride of position must be absent (5:1), and the heart of a shepherd must be present (5:2a). He then illustrates the shepherd's heart with three essential attitudes: willingness (5:2b), eagerness (5:2c), and meekness (5:3). Peter ends his address to the elder-pastors with a reminder of their eternal reward. If Christ's shepherds faithfully discharge their duties with the proper attitudes, they will receive "the unfading crown of glory" from Christ at his return. As the "Chief Shepherd," Jesus serves as the model of how his earthly shepherds are to serve.

NOVEMBER 27

1 Peter 5:5-14



THE DRAMATIC CLIMAX OF THIS LETTER READS LIKE A GENERAL RALLYING HIS TROOPS BEFORE LEADING THEM INTO BATTLE.

Peter addresses those who are younger in the faith, urging them to submit to their commanders' authority and leadership. They must follow their examples with humility, entrusting themselves to the great commander in chief, in whose service the battle can never be lost. He then reminds them of the enemy. In unmistakable terms, Peter identifies and describes the devil.

We must always be aware that someone is hunting us. Satan knows our weaknesses and our depravity. We must never forget that we are his prey and that this roaring lion is ravenous with hunger. Satan prowls and pounces when we least expect it, which explains our need to remain alert and disciplined. His one purpose is to destroy us. Therefore, we must be aware of his tactics and have a respect for his power. We must never allow ourselves to underestimate the adversary's ability to outwit, deceive, and attack us.

What are we to do when we face the adversary? Panic? Run? Surrender? No! Peter says, "Resist him, steadfast in your faith." The word "resist" means to stand against and oppose. We don't resist Satan with confidence in our own power or ability. We resist him with unshakable faith in our all-powerful God, relying on his defense to stand against the wicked works of the devil.

Peter ends his letter to the church with the truth that present sufferings are intimately connected to eternal glory. God will see us through. God will one day bring us home. We will suffer for a little while - this whole life through - but then we will gain eternal reward and glory. We are to go forward each day in the light of his promise.

NOVEMBER 28

2 Peter 1



AS WE BEGIN, IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THE TONE OF THIS LETTER. IT IS MORE POLEMICAL (CRITICAL) THAN PASTORAL. IT IS A FIGHTING LETTER MORE THAN IT IS A FRIENDLY ONE. THE LETTER IS SURPRISINGLY AGGRESSIVE.

There is a significant need in the world today for direction and for clear truth according to real knowledge. This need even applies to life's most ordinary situations. Just about every person I know wants the same two things in life. We want our lives to mean something and we want our lives to leave something. To put it another way, everybody feels the need to be significant, to have some kind of unique purpose to fulfill in this life. They also want to bestow meaningful results of their labors on future generations.

The first section of Peter's letter provides counsel on how to keep from feeling useless and unfruitful. This letter begins by focusing on the kind of lifestyle that will keep us from slipping into irrelevance. The apostles knew that after their death the gospel message they preached would be challenged by many and discarded by some. They were aware that the church would need answers on great gospel questions, especially those relating to final judgement, Christ's future coming, and life in light of these realities. This letter is meant to remind readers across the ages that the content of the apostles' message, as put forward in the preaching of Peter, is true and unchanging.

In disclosing the nearness of his death, Peter underlines the urgency of the hour, and reveals the method by which he would have us learn. He teaches by way of *reminder*. The truth of God's grace and peace through Jesus is enough to give your life meaning and purpose.

NOVEMBER 29

2 Peter 2



THE APOSTLE PETER WAGES WAR AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS. HE ENCOURAGES US TO TAKE A GOOD, LONG, HARD LOOK AT FALSE PREACHERS AND FAILING PEOPLE.

By calling the preachers out, he hopes his readers might learn how to spot them before they do irreversible harm.

Peter's aim is to equip us to stand on the Day of Judgment. He is well aware that others seek only to "entice unsteady souls" (2:14). This little phrase stands at the center of our text and provides a summary for the whole. Whereas Peter would strengthen us in faith, these men would love nothing more than to see us stumble into spiritual failure.

The word translated "entice" is a fishing term. Perhaps the irony was intended. Peter was fulfilling his divine calling as a fisher of men, but others (not called by God) were trolling for the same souls but with evil intent. He would have us know how to distinguish true preachers from those who are merely luring us to follow after false ways. False teachers often appear doctrinally sound, personally attractive, sincere, and logically compelling. But they are deceivers, mind-benders, truth-twisters. He warns us to be aware of their wicked schemes. The false teachers Peter has in mind are not merely confused Christians, doubting Thomases, or backslidden believers. These are false professors, people who appear for a time to be authentic but are like counterfeit bills amidst a pocketful of the real thing. They can pass themselves off as true Christians for a while, but eventually their words and deeds give them away.

The closer you walk with Jesus the more you will know the true from the false.

NOVEMBER 30

2 Peter 3



IN THESE FINAL WORDS TO THE CHURCHES PRIOR TO HIS MARTYRDOM, THE OLD FISHERMAN ANSWERS THE QUESTION, “HOW WILL ALL THIS END?”

Peter’s final thought develops the issue of the end times. He presents a last reminder that God’s testimony is trustworthy (3:1–2). He gives us a final warning to avoid worldly corruption and false teachers (3:11, 17–18). He proclaims a glorious promise of a new creation coming in which righteousness dwells (3:13).

In reading Peter on the return of Christ, I am struck by how straightforward he is about it all. Peter doesn’t wave the second coming of Christ like a club in the hands of a lunatic. He is not asking us to keep looking to the sky in fright and fear. Rather, he promotes a realistic view of life. God created the world and as Creator he will pull the curtain down on this world when he has had enough of its rebellion. In light of this, we should give ourselves to careful, quiet preparation for that inevitable fact.

Peter steps back, gathers his thoughts, and states that this world will come to an end, but it won’t come to an end because of temporal physical properties. The end will come by the intentional command and word of God, in the very hour he so decides to reveal the glory and supremacy of Jesus.

Peter closes his letter by encouraging us to stay on our guard against spiritual adversaries. We must keep seeking to grow spiritually strong. We are commended to “supplement our faith” with the qualities that will lead us to our heavenly home. While we are saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone, our faith must and will grow while traveling home.

Jesus is coming and he really does win.

DECEMBER 1

1 John 1:1-7



IMAGINE YOU FIND YOURSELF DEEP IN A CAVE. IT IS COMPLETELY DARK. YOU CAN'T SEE ANYTHING AT ALL SO YOU TAKE YOUR PHONE OUT AND TURN ON ITS FLASHLIGHT. THE DARKNESS FLEES.

The first thing that we must remember is that darkness is the absence of light. Darkness and light cannot dwell in the same place. Where light exists there can be no darkness at all (5). Since God is light, and we are made in the image of God, that means we too are to be the light. However, we have to be careful that we walk in the light. In the world we live in today this is not an easy task. Everywhere we go we are surrounded by darkness. This just means that we must shine our lights brighter.

This passage does not say to stay away from the darkness. It says don't walk in the darkness. Let's think about the flashlight again. If we turn on the flashlight in a well lit room what happens? There is not much that happens. Now take that same flashlight and turn it on in a completely dark room, it turns the darkness away.

As Christians we need to go to the darkness in order to allow our lights to shine bright. We can go to the darkness without walking in the darkness. Are you walking in darkness or light? Are you shining your light so that all can see?

DECEMBER 2

1 John 1:8-10



WE ALL SIN. THAT IS A FACT OF LIFE. WHETHER IT IS A LITTLE WHITE LIE, OR A LUSTFUL THOUGHT, OR AN OUTBURST OF ANGER, WE ALL SIN.

When we sin, we usually like to keep that sin to ourselves. We generally don't want anyone to find out what we did or what we struggle with. However, as we see here, confession is important to the healing process. When we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive.

Forgiveness is such a beautiful thing. When we are forgiven, God does not say that what we did was okay. Forgiveness is God showing us his grace even though we do not deserve it. Forgiveness is not something that is earned. It is something that is given to us in spite of us. Even when we confess our sin, we don't deserve our Holy God's forgiveness. Yet he gives it to us anyway. When we confess our sin, we are admitting that we did something wrong. Our God is faithful and as we confess, he forgives.

What sin do you have in your life right now that you need to confess? Take a few moments today to list those sins to God and ask for his forgiveness. Take the time today to admit the wrong you have done. Allow the wonderful forgiveness of our great God to wash over you today as you cry out to him.

DECEMBER 3

1 John 2:1-11



IN THE COURTROOM IT IS THE DUTY OF THE LAWYER TO PLEAD THE CASE FOR HIS CLIENT. THEREFORE, HAVING A GOOD LAWYER IS VERY IMPORTANT WHEN YOU ARE FACING A JUDGE AND JURY.

I have great news for us. When we mess up, we have the greatest lawyer we could ever want: Jesus Christ. Jesus pleads our case. He speaks to the Father on our behalf. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for us when he went to the cross to make atonement for the sins of the world (2:2). Since we know that Jesus makes a defense for us when we sin, does this give us the right to do whatever we want? No, we must obey his commands.

Verse 3 says that if we know him we will obey his commands. When we say we belong to him but don't obey his commands, we are liars (2:4). What a bold statement that John is making here. It is our duty to obey the commands that God has set before us. His commands are there to protect us. A parent tells his child not to touch the hot stove in order to protect the child from getting hurt. God's commands are there to help keep us from getting hurt. Some commands are easier to obey than others. What commands do you struggle with? Which ones do you find easy?

Find someone you can trust to help you in the areas where you struggle. Know that you can always overcome every struggle in life because you have an advocate in Jesus defending you to the Father.

DECEMBER 4

1 John 2:12-17



HOW WONDERFUL IT IS TO KNOW THAT OUR SINS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN.

When we call on the name of Jesus and invite him into our hearts as Lord and Savior, our sins are forgiven. The Bible tells us they have been removed as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12). Today, I want us to stop and think about that for a few minutes. Our sins have been forgiven. All the mistakes we have made. All the wrong that we have done. Gone. They are no longer held against us. Jesus paid the price for them upon the cross. As the wonderful song goes, “what sins are you talking about. I don’t remember them anymore.” What sins have you been forgiven of? How has your life changed from knowing Jesus as your Savior?

Since our sins have been forgiven, we need to be careful not to follow the ways of the world. In verses 15-17, we see that the ways of God and the ways of the world are different. It is clear to see that the ways of the world stand in opposition to the ways of God. The world says things like abortion and homosexuality are ok. The Word says they are wrong. The world says live for yourselves. The Word says live for God and help others. When we do what God says is wrong, it is sin. Thus, we need to follow after God and not the world. Since our sins have been forgiven, we need to do our best to no longer live in sin but follow after the Father, and not the world.

DECEMBER 5

I John 2:18-28



IFIND GREAT COMFORT IN KNOWING THAT I CANNOT LOSE MY SALVATION. ONCE I TRULY GIVE MY LIFE TO CHRIST, I CANNOT LOSE THAT.

John helps us to see this simple truth in today's verses. He says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us" (2:19). Later in verse 25 John says, "And this is the promise that he made to us - eternal life." If we could lose our salvation, then why does the Bible say we are given eternal life. It does not say that we are given life until we mess up or we sin. It says we are given eternal life. Forever.

Our salvation is completely and totally based upon the work of Jesus Christ. It has nothing to do with you or me. He paid the price. He took our sin. He is the one that offers us the gift. Once we accept the gift, it is our gift for life. In other words, once you are saved, you cannot lose your salvation. True salvation cannot be lost. When we are truly saved we are given eternal life. 1 Peter 1:3-4 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (CSB). What great hope, comfort, peace, and assurance we find in this beautiful truth.

DECEMBER 6

1 John 3:1-15



JOHAN IS HELPING US SEE THAT AS CHRISTIANS WE SHOULD BE DIFFERENT.

We are God's children and as God's children we should act as such. One of the greatest ways that the world knows we belong to Jesus is by our love for one another. Verse 10 says, "This is how God's children and the devil's children become obvious. Whoever does not do what is right is not of God, especially the one who does not love his brother or sister" (CSB). The message of love is not something new. God tells the people of Israel that they are to love their neighbors, each other, the foreigner, and most importantly the Lord their God. Jesus is always preaching on the love that we are to have for people. We are to love one another. John then shows us what love does not look like.

Cain killed his brother. Because God accepted Abel's sacrifice, Cain became jealous. Cain's jealousy became stronger towards his brother than his love for his brother and it led him to take his life. According to John MacArthur, "murder is the ultimate act of hate and demonstrates the absence of love in the most extreme way." Cain showed the opposite of love. No matter what this world, or the people in it, does to us, we must still love them. Even when the world hates us, we still must love them. Verse 15 is a hard verse to hear. In the eyes of God, hate is so powerful, that here he says that if we hate our brother, then we are a murderer. If we hate people, then we are murderers and we do not have the love of Christ living in us.

DECEMBER 7

1 John 3:16-24



TODAY, WE SEE THE ULTIMATE EXAMPLE OF LOVE.
REAL GENUINE LOVE INVOLVES SACRIFICE.

The most beautiful example of love was when God sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. Many times we forget just how awesome the love of God truly is. We forget the price that Jesus paid on the cross for our sins. God loved us so much that he took our place. He gave up his life so we too are to give up our lives for the brothers. We could be called to die for someone else. We could be called to give up our time, money, or stuff. Real love helps to meet real needs.

Love is not love until it is put into action. If we see someone in need and we have the ability to help them and we don't, then we don't love. Take a parent for example. If a parent tells his or her kids that he or she loves them but never shows that love, is it really love? What if the parent never feeds the kid, gets the kid clothes, makes sure the kid is healthy, but tells the kid he or she loves them? This is not love. The kid knows the parent loves him or her because of the actions of the parents. The world will know that we love them because of our actions. We are not to love in tongue, but in deed. Deed comes from the Greek word "to work". Love is a choice that we make. God loves us, thus we are to love others unconditionally.

DECEMBER 8

1 John 4:1-19



HOW AWESOME IS IT THAT WE SERVE A GOD WHO IS GREATER THAN ALL.

When we give our lives to him, he comes and lives with us. Because the Spirit of Holy God lives in us we can overcome anything. Greater is he who is in us, than he who is in the world. The world can do many things to us. It can take our money, take our jobs, and even take our lives. One thing this would can not take from us is our God. He is with us each and every step of the way helping us to overcome any obstacle that we may face. We know that he has our best in mind because he loved us first.

What a power statement John makes here in verse 19. “We love because he first loved us.” Before you or I were ever born, God had already sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. Before creation existed, he knew that he would send his son to take our place. God loves us so much that he died for us. We also see in this passage that God is love. If God is love and God lives in us, then is it not safe to say that we should love others in the way that God has loved us. God loved the people around us so much that he died for them too. We are to love others because he loves others. We are to love others because he loves us. If God can love and forgive me after all that I have done, then I can love and forgive anyone for what they have done to me. We are called to be people of love

DECEMBER 9

1 John 4:20-5:3



OUR LOVE FOR GOD IS SHOWN BY THE WAY THAT WE LOVE OTHERS. JOHN TELLS US HERE THAT IF WE DON'T HAVE LOVE FOR OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, THEN WE DON'T LOVE GOD.

Let's face it, there are a lot of people out there that are hard to love. I know that right now some names are coming to your mind. The Bible says that we have to love them too. How can we love what we do not see, if we don't love what is standing right in front of us?

We also see that we show our love for God by how we obey his commands. When we give our lives to Christ, we become children of God. As children we are to obey our Father. Guess what one of the commands is that God gives to us? Love one another. This is a command. It is not a suggestion, or an option. It does not say love those who love you. It says love one another. To follow his commands are not a burden. His commands are there to help us, guide us, and protect us. We obey him because we know that he wants our best. He loves us and cares for us. Who in your life do you find it hard to love right now? What has happened to make them hard to love? Will you pray for them and yourself? Pray that God would help you to love them and that we would bless them.

DECEMBER 10

1 John 5:4-13



OUR FAITH IS THE VICTORY THAT OVERCOMES THE WORLD. OUR FAITH IS IN JESUS CHRIST, THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD.

He is the one who died for your sins, my sins, and the sins of the world. In scripture, God the Father clearly shows us that Jesus is his son and that Jesus is the Savior of the world. Salvation can only be found in Jesus alone. We cannot earn it. We can not get it by being good people. The only way that we can become right with God is to believe (or have faith in) the fact that we need a Savior.

When we accept him as our Savior, we can be certain that we become a child of God. Here John tells us that he has written so that we may know. There are a lot of things in the Bible that are hard to understand. One thing that is very clear in scripture is how we can be saved through Jesus alone. Everything that John has written to this point is to show us that we can know for sure we are a Christian. When we give our lives over to Christ, choosing to believe in his death, burial, and resurrection, we can have confidence knowing that we are saved. We have been given eternal life.

DECEMBER 11

1 John 5:14-21



WE CAN HAVE CONFIDENCE WHEN WE COME TO GOD IN PRAYER. NO MATTER HOW BIG OUR PROBLEM MAY SEEM TO US OR HOW SMALL IT MAY SEEM, GOD STILL HEARS OUR PRAYER.

Not only does he hear our prayers, but he also answers our prayer. We just don't always like the answer that we get. When we make requests to God in prayer, there are three ways that he answers us: yes, no, or wait. Sometimes we get the answer that none of us like: wait. In our fast paced world of fast food and microwaves, we don't like to wait for anything. There are times when we pray that we must wait. We must wait on God's timing and not our own.

When it comes to prayer we can know that God will answer based on what is best for us. I look back over my life, and I see many prayers where God said no, and I'm thankful he did. I am sure you can think of some of those too. There are times where I am glad God told me to wait. When the time of waiting was over the prayer was answered far better than anything I could have ever imagined. God knows what he is doing when he answers our prayers. We can bring any request to God with confidence that he will hear us. My dear brothers and sisters, never doubt the power of prayer that we have when we come before our great God.

DECEMBER 12

2 John



THERE ARE THREE MESSAGES THAT JOHN HAS FOR HIS READERS.

The first thing that we see is the need to walk in truth. In verse 4, John commends his readers for walking in the truth. If someone were to write a letter to us today, would we be commended for walking in the truth? The truth can be found in the word of God. It is our manual by which we live. If we are not walking by what it says, then we are not walking in the truth.

The second thing that we see is the need to love one another. It is clear to see this topic is important to John. We saw it show up many times in 1 John and see it here again in 2 John. As Christians we need to be people who love others.

The third thing that we see is that we need to watch out for those who seek to change the truth. In verse 7 we see that there were some who were denying that Jesus came in the flesh. Today we see many people and organizations that try to change the truth of the Bible. The Bible is truth and we need to be watchful of those who teach what does not line up with it. In order for us to know if what they are teaching lines up with the word of God, we need to spend time reading and studying the word of God. It is in the Bible that we know what truth is, we learn how to love one another, and we are able to discern those who are not of the truth.

DECEMBER 13

3 John



TODAY WE COME TO THE SHORTEST BOOK IN THE BIBLE. EVEN THOUGH IT MAY BE SHORT, IT HAS SOME VALUABLE LESSONS FOR US.

Just like in 2 John, we see three life lessons. Lesson number one: be faithful in all that you do (5). Colossians 3:23 says, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.” Everything that we do, we should do faithfully. We should do everything to the best of our abilities, giving glory to God. Imagine the difference we would see in this world if all people did all things faithfully for God.

Lesson number two: support those who serve (8). There are many men and women who take the message of Christ all over the world. We need to join in the ministry with them by supporting them. There are many ways we can support them. I am just going to mention two. We can support them by praying for them. No minister or missionary will ever say they get too much prayer. Another way we can support them is financially. There are some who raise their own support as they go out on the field.

Lesson number three: do what is good (11). We need to do what is good and right. John says the one who does what is good is from God. With so much bad in our world today we need to be agents of good. We need to live our lives in a way that lines up with the Bible and show the world Jesus Christ.

DECEMBER 14

Jude 1:1-16



DEFENDING THE FAITH IS NOT AN EASY TASK. WE HAVE THE FEAR OF BEING LAUGHED AT, SAYING THE WRONG THING, OR HURTING A FRIEND'S FEELINGS.

Jude tells us that we need to contend for the faith. As Christians we can make a difference in this world by simply standing for what we believe in. Sadly, some Christians just sit on the sidelines. They don't get out of their pews, they don't get out of the church, and they don't stand up for what they believe in. We need to be people who stand up for and preach the truth. Just like in Jude's day, today we still have those who come along and pervert the truth. The truth has been perverted by those who stand against us. The time is now for us, the people of God, to stand up and defend the faith. Those who teach against the word of God will be judged by God.

After Jude tells us to contend for our faith, he then reminds his readers of the times that God had destroyed those who went away from him. The people were saved from Egypt, then many died in the desert because they turned from God's truth. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of sexual immorality. Korah rebelled against God and the earth swallowed them (Numbers 16). God will judge those who do not speak the truth. We need to watch out for these people so that we will not be led away by their teaching. It is important that we study God's word so that we will be able to defend the faith when people pervert the truth of God.

DECEMBER 15

Jude 1:17-25



JUDE GIVES US GUIDELINES OF HOW WE CAN DEFEND OUR FAITH.

First, our faith must be holy. The word holy means to be set apart, different. Our faith should be different from the rest of the world. The world has faith in money, fame, others, etc. We have faith in Jesus. Second, we are to pray in the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 tells us that the Spirit prays on our behalf when we don't know how we should pray. Prayer is very valuable to us as Christians. It is a direct line to God. In the Old Testament people had to go through the priests. Now, because of Jesus, we have direct access to our God. Third, we are to keep ourselves in the love of God. The love of God is amazing and powerful. There is nothing that can separate us from that love. It is the love of God that sent Jesus to the earth to die on the cross for our sins. Since God has poured out his love and mercy on us, we are to show love and mercy to others.

We have mercy on others by snatching them from the fire. We are in a real war where eternity hangs in the balance. Those who die without Jesus will spend eternity in hell. Those who die with Jesus will spend eternity in heaven. The greatest act of love that we can show to another person is to tell them the truth about who Jesus is. Only when a person comes to know Jesus as their Savior can they stand before a Holy God blameless. We cannot get them to accept Jesus, but we sure can tell them about Jesus.

DECEMBER 16

Revelation 1



THE WORD APOCALYPSE STRIKES FEAR INTO PEOPLE. FROM THE WORLD'S PERSPECTIVE, AN APOCALYPSE IS A GREAT DISASTER. FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE, APOCALYPSE MEANS REVEALING OR DISCLOSING SOMETHING TO BE SEEN.

The Apostle John wrote Revelation, but the source of the information is the Lord Jesus himself. "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John" (1:1).

There is a threefold purpose in Revelation. The first purpose is to reveal. God's intent is to reveal the things that are to come from the futurist perspective. There is not perfect agreement among Bible believing Christians on the details of the end times. The essential non-negotiables are the literal return of Jesus to the earth, the raising of the dead, the judgment of all people, and heaven and hell in the eternal state. The second purpose is to prepare. God reveals what is to come at the pinnacle of history as we know it. The third purpose is to inspire hope. Much of what we see in the news and in the world is utter hopelessness. God is the God of hope and we are the most hopeful people of all in the world if our faith is in Jesus Christ. God's plan for the world and his people is certain.

There is a blessing promised to all who read this book. "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near" (1:3). The time is near, be ready!

DECEMBER 17

Revelation 2:1-7



JOHN WAS GIVEN A VISION OF THE SON OF MAN AND FELL AT HIS FEET AS THOUGH HE WAS DEAD (REVELATION 1:16-19).

Jesus identified himself as the first and the last, the one who has the keys to Death and Hades. He instructed John to write about the things he had seen and the things that were to take place after. The words of the Lord to the seven churches of Asia Minor follow.

The church in Ephesus was commended for their works, their toil, and their patient endurance. They did not tolerate those who are evil, and tested those who called themselves apostles but were not and found them to be false. They had not grown weary in their endurance. Yet there was a rebuke that came from the Lord. They had abandoned the love they had at first (2:4). They were doing what was right, but their love for the Lord was not what it should have been.

This is a strong word to us today. We can have our doctrine correct. We can work hard and be busy in the things of the Lord. We can endure even when circumstances are quite difficult. However, if our love for Jesus is not first and foremost in our lives and the churches we serve in, he is not pleased.

Jesus instructed the church to remember from where they had fallen. Then to repent, meaning a change of attitude resulting in a change of direction. Finally, he told them to return and do the works they had done at first. Think about where you are in your walk with Jesus. Is your love for him first and foremost in all you do? If not, heed the words of Jesus and remember, repent, and return.

DECEMBER 18

Revelation 2:8-11



SMYRNA WAS A SEAPORT ON THE AEGEAN SEA, ABOUT 40 MILES TO THE NORTH OF EPHESUS, AND WAS A LARGE CITY OF AROUND 100,000 PEOPLE.

Jesus did not rebuke this church because they had remained faithful. The believers in the church there experienced great tribulation and deep poverty, and even so they were wealthy spiritually. The Lord warned the church of what was to come.

The devil was about to throw some of them into prison, so they would be tested, and they would experience even more tribulation. Jesus told them not to fear, and to be faithful unto death. He promised they would receive a crown of life, the fullness of eternal life as their reward. These references likely refer to historical persecution which took place under the Roman Empire.

The words of Jesus are most appropriate for Christians and for churches who desire to be faithful in our 21st century context. Persecution is on the rise and is intensifying. Largely, persecution in the United States has been limited to mockery and marginalization of the faith. Daily in other parts of the world followers of Jesus are paying the ultimate price with their lives.

When we read and hear of persecution across the world, and even when it hits close to home, Jesus has a word for us as well. We are not to fear because we are people of faith. Look to him for your hope. Be faithful, even if this requires being faithful to the point of death. Whatever may happen to us in this life pales in comparison to what God has prepared for us eternally. The crown of life is available to all who will trust in the Lord and endure in the face of persecution.

DECEMBER 19

Revelation 2:12-17



PERGAMUM WAS LOCATED ON THE AEGEAN COAST. THE NAME MEANS “CITADEL.”

The city was full of pagan cults and was identified as dwelling in the location of Satan’s throne. The city was full of spiritual pitfalls. In the midst of this, the church had held strongly in their commitment to and witness for Jesus. Jesus had a few things against them. Some among them held to the teaching of Balaam. Balaam told Balak he could overcome Israel by involving them in Moabite religious feasts including prostitution (Numbers 25). This would result in unfaithfulness and bring them under judgment.

The pagan cults in Pergamum were likely urging Christians to join in the pagan feasts and sexual immorality. Those who participated from the church were approving of Balaam’s teaching. The Nicolaitans apparently saw these sins as acceptable as well. Pagan cults may not be the primary temptation in our context today, but pagan culture certainly is. Personal holiness among Christians does not seem to be a primary topic of focus. More emphasis is placed on Christian liberty. Liberty is not a license to sin, it is an encouragement to holiness. We are to live in all things, for the glory of God and for the sake of our witness for him.

The word to the church in Pergamum was to repent. If they did not, they could expect a day of reckoning from the Lord himself. The same word comes to us. For any who have fallen into sinful activities that are not pleasing to God, there is a warning to repent. A strong church will be made up of people who are seeking to walk in the holiness of God and provide a pure witness to a watching world of the transforming power of the grace of God.

DECEMBER 20

Revelation 2:18-29



JESUS WROTE TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA TO COMMEND THE CHURCH AND TO WARN THEM FOR WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THE CHURCH.

He referenced their works, love, faith, service, and patient endurance. Their works were even increasing, with the latter ones exceeding the first ones. These are strong commendations of faithfulness to the Lord and every church would do well to emulate them.

The problem in their midst is they tolerated the woman Jezebel. She was a woman claiming to be a prophetess, but instead was teaching and seducing the servants of God to practice sexual immorality and eat food sacrificed to idols. This woman is probably symbolic of false teaching in these areas as a whole. God gave her time to repent, but she refused to do so. Her judgment was that she would be thrown onto a sickbed and all who committed adultery with her would be thrown into great tribulation unless they repented, and her children would be struck dead.

One cannot help but think of the gross sexual immorality that is being promoted in many churches today. The form of it may vary from what is specified here but the sin is the same. People misuse human sexuality which God created as good, in perverse and unholy ways. Judgment on this evil is certain. In the church we cannot tolerate what God declares as evil, nor can we tolerate it in our own lives.

We must hold fast to what we have until Jesus returns. Do not be swayed by an evil culture, or by false teachers who call themselves followers of Jesus. Be anchored in the Word of God. The faithful will ultimately have authority over the nations, and are promised the morning star who is Jesus, and he is the greatest treasure of all!

DECEMBER 21

Revelation 3:1-6



WHAT SEEMS TO BE ALIVE, MAY ACTUALLY BE DEAD. HOW COULD THAT BE?

This is exactly what Jesus said about the church in Sardis. Many churches are busy with a flurry of activities, and think they are alive. In reality many of them are dead, because busyness does not equate with spiritual vitality.

The church at Sardis was instructed to wake up, and strengthen what was left and about to die, because he had not found their works complete in the sight of God. This is a timely word to many churches to wake up while there is still time. There is currently much discussion about discipleship and church revitalization. Maybe this is the word that needs to be heard most of all. Even though there is work going on, the work may not be complete in the sight of God.

Sardis was exhorted to remember what they had received and heard, keep it, and repent. There were still a few among them who had not soiled their garments, who were deemed worthy by Jesus. These represent the faithful remnant. In most churches, even churches that are nearly dead, there is usually a faithful remnant. There are people who have maintained a proper focus on Jesus and his work, and truly desire to see God's glory manifested in their midst. If you are part of that godly remnant, stay focused, and be encouraged.

Jesus described the conquerors as those who are clothed in white garments. The white garments represent the righteousness of Jesus granted to us by faith. When you are declared righteous through faith in Jesus, it is certain that your name is secure in the book of life! Jesus promises to confess your name before his father and before his angels.

DECEMBER 22

Revelation 3:7-13



JESUS KNOWS YOUR WORKS. THIS IS A THEME THAT RECURS IN THE LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES.

He sees it all. This is a humbling thought, that nothing goes unnoticed, whether good or bad, in the sight of the Lord. Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love, had a church made up of believers who were given an open door which no one was able to shut. Apparently they were few in number, and were described as having little power. In spite of this, they kept the word of God and did not deny the name of Jesus.

Sometimes when we look at the resources around us, we can be discouraged. Perhaps you are in a church which is few in number. Your resources may be meager from the world's perspective. Be encouraged because you serve the Holy One, the True One, who opens doors no man can shut and shuts doors no man can open.

Jesus has set an open door before his churches. The open door represents certain opportunity. As believers individually, and then collectively as the body of Christ, we have an open door in the kingdom of God to do his work, carry out his will in the world, and be faithful witnesses of his to the ends of the earth. Do not be discouraged or dismayed by your relatively small strength. The work of God does not depend on your power; it depends on the power of God.

The church at Philadelphia kept the word about patient endurance, and Jesus promised to keep them ultimately from the trial to come. They were told to hold fast to what they had so no one could seize their crown. Jesus promises to make those who conquer a permanent pillar in the temple of God!

DECEMBER 23

Revelation 3:14-22



CHURCH ATTENDANCE IS IN A STATE OF DECLINE. THE LIVES OF MANY CHRISTIANS LOOK NO DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF THE WORLD.

Many are distracted, uncommitted, and complacent in their faith. This is actually not a new problem at all. Jesus had a word for the church at Laodicea. Unlike the other six churches referenced, they received no commendation at all. Their works were neither cold nor hot. They were lukewarm, and because of this Jesus said he would spit them out of his mouth. The drinking water for the city came from a hot spring located six miles to the south over an aqueduct and when it arrived it was lukewarm. A physical illustration was used to make a spiritual point.

They thought they had it all and had need of nothing. Self-sufficiency is a significant problem today because it grows spiritual apathy. They were declared to be wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Jesus instructed them to buy from him gold refined by fire, and white garments to clothe themselves in, and salve to anoint their eyes. Represented are spiritual riches, righteousness, and clear spiritual vision from God.

To be reproved and disciplined is evidence of the love of Jesus for his people. He cares about where we are spiritually, and desires us to walk faithfully with him. When he reproveth and disciplines, we should be zealous and repent as he instructed the church at Laodicea to do. The words of verses 20 to 22 are first to the lukewarm Christian to open the door of the heart and enter into intimate fellowship with Jesus Christ. The words could be appropriately applied in evangelism as well because the invitation to eternal life is to know Jesus. Are you hot hearted in your devotion to God?

DECEMBER 24

Revelation 4



IN A VISION, JOHN WAS CAUGHT UP IN HEAVEN TO SEE WHAT WOULD TAKE PLACE IN THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD ON THE WORLD. HE WAS IN THE SPIRIT, AND SAW A THRONE IN HEAVEN WITH ONE SEATED ON THE THRONE.

The scene is magnificent with precious jewels adorning the throne. From the throne came lightning, thunder, burning torches of fire and a sea of glass was before it.

A unified chorus rises before the throne of God day and night without end. “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (4:8) “Worthy are you, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (4:11).

Interpretations of Revelation 4 through 19 vary greatly regarding the various types and symbols. One could easily lose sight of the main subject of these chapters by getting bogged down in the details. The main subject of these chapters is the glory of our great God. He is King over all of his creation. God is the holy one who is sovereign over life and eternity. He sent his son Jesus to redeem all who will repent and believe in him. Jesus will return again, just as he came the first time, to judge the living and the dead, to defeat all enemies, and to usher in the eternal state.

God deserves all the glory. Each of our lives should join in the eternal chorus to God because he is worthy. We should be prepared to meet God because it is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Whether we appear in the presence of God in death, or when Jesus returns, we must be ready.

DECEMBER 25

Revelation 5



THE ONE SEATED ON THE THRONE HAD A SCROLL SEALED WITH SEVEN SEALS. AN ANGEL PROCLAIMED LOUDLY, “WHO IS WORTHY TO OPEN THE SCROLL AND BREAK ITS SEALS?” (5:2)

No one in heaven or on earth was found worthy and John began to weep. One of the elders in heaven told John, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals” (5:5).

By his own blood Jesus, the Lamb of God, “ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom of priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (5:9-10). Jesus is worthy and this is a powerful reminder of the mission God has given to the church. Our focus must be on the glory of King Jesus who, by his own blood, secured forgiveness for our sins, and through faith in him brings us to the throne of God.

The gospel is not limited by time, geography, or culture. God intends for the message about Jesus to go to the ends of the earth. We do this in obedience and in anticipation of the great scene John was privileged to see. There were “myriads and myriads and thousands of thousands” (5:11) around the throne of God. They all were giving praise to Jesus because worthy is the Lamb who was slain!

Heaven is God’s dwelling place, and is a real place. God receives honor and glory there, and is surrounded by innumerable worshipers! Our lives on this earth are temporary, but they are purposeful in preparation for eternity. Is your worship driven by an eternal vision?

DECEMBER 26

Revelation 6:1-8:5



JOHN WAS GIVEN REVELATION ABOUT THE JUDGMENTS THAT WOULD COME ON THE EARTH AFTER THE LAMB OF GOD OPENED THE SEALS ON THE SCROLL (REVELATION 5:1).

The judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowl judgments are in the context of the revelation given about Daniel's seventieth week (Daniel 9:24-27), the time of the Great Tribulation. Revelation 6 is very similar to the Olivet Discourse spoken by Jesus (Matthew 24:1-25:46). The judgments are progressively worse as they unfold in Scripture.

The first four of the seven seals are referred to as the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. They represent the Antichrist, warfare, famine, and plague along with more famine and warfare. The fifth seal regards those martyred for their faith during the end time events. The sixth seal represents a cataclysmic earthquake which is devastating, along with the sun becoming black and the moon becoming like blood. Those who survive the events cry out to God for deliverance.

Revelation 7 depicts a great multitude gathered around the throne of God that no one could number. Among the multitude are people from every nation, tribes, people, and languages standing before the throne in white robes crying out "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (7:10) The ones in white robes are depicted as coming out of the Great Tribulation and who have been washed white in the blood of the Lamb.

Finally, the seventh seal was opened and there was silence in heaven. Prayers were offered up to the throne of God and there was lightning, thunder, rumblings, and an earthquake. These events should inspire faith and not fear. We too will gather around the throne of our victorious God in the future and offer the praise that is due him.

DECEMBER 27

Revelation 8:6-11:19



THE SEVEN TRUMPETS ARE THE SUBSTANCE OF THE SEVENTH SEAL IN REVELATION 8:1-5.

The first trumpet brings hail and fire upon the earth. The second trumpet brings what may be a meteor destroying most of the sea life. The third trumpet affects rivers and lakes instead of the ocean. The fourth trumpet makes the sun and moon become dark. The fifth trumpet is a plague of locusts which attack people. The sixth trumpet releases a demon driven army which kills a third of the human population. The seventh trumpet summons seven angels who will pour out the bowls of God's wrath.

There is an interlude that shifts from judgment to encouragement of believers in Revelation 10. A mighty angel descended from heaven as a messenger of God. His crown was a rainbow, the enduring symbol of God's mercy and faithfulness to his people. The angel was radiant. There is also a shift in location because the angel descends from heaven to earth and stands on the earth where John hears a voice from heaven. The scroll he held in his hand was already open and the message went out to the whole earth. He pointed to Eternal God who can bring about what he pleases.

Two witnesses will come forth during the time of the Great Tribulation empowered by God to bear testimony to him. They will be killed when their testimony is finished and the bowls of wrath will come swiftly after this. Although the events of the Great Tribulation will be comprehensively awful, and the wrath of God certain, they do not overshadow the glory of God. Those who know him will continue to give glory. We should give glory to God on earth, no matter how difficult life is because he is our Deliverer!

DECEMBER 28

Revelation 12:1-16:21



JOHAN SAW A VISION OF A WOMAN ABOUT TO GIVE BIRTH AND A RED DRAGON, IDENTIFIED AS SATAN, THE POWERFUL FOE OF GOD.

His seven heads and ten horns represent seven nations and ten rulers under his authority. The royal crowns represent their authority. The third of the stars of heaven represent the angels Satan led in rebellion against God who were cast out of heaven.

Satan failed in his attempt to destroy Jesus before he was born, and turned his attention to Israel. A war is depicted as arising in heaven, and the dragon and his angels are defeated. Satan is actively opposing God in the present, so these verses describe events yet to take place. There will be a great celebration in heaven that the accuser of the brothers has been thrown down to the earth.

The first beast rises opposing God and the second beast rises opposing God and imposing the mark of the beast, 666. Only those who take the mark will survive. Three angels come warning the people of God. They call for endurance, keeping the commandments of God, and faith in Jesus. Seven angels with seven plagues arise and subsequently the bowls of God's wrath come. These include painful sores, death of every living thing in the sea, rivers turning to blood, the intensification of the heat of the sun, darkness and increase of sores, the Euphrates River drying up, and the armies of Antichrist gathering for the Battle of Armageddon, and finally a devastating earthquake with large hailstones.

The angels of God cry out, "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed" (15:4). Let us fear our great God, and glorify his name!

DECEMBER 29

Revelation 17:1-20:15



THE VISION CONTAINED IN CHAPTER 17 IS THE ONLY ONE WHERE AN INTERPRETING ANGEL COMMUNICATES THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE VISION.

The great prostitute is Babylon, which is directly connected with immorality and idolatry. The content of the Babylonian system, its evil character, and judgment are the fountainhead of other evil religious systems and everything opposed to God. She is depicted as being “drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (17:6).

The beast who is Antichrist, comes out of the bottomless pit. Jesus will destroy the beast and his kingdom when he returns to the earth. The kingdoms will fight against Jesus as he returns to the earth and the Lamb of God will overtake them. They represent the age old apostate religious system through which the Antichrist in the middle of the Tribulation will demand worship for himself.

John also describes the devastation of the economic system during the tribulation. Luxurious living in part will lead to Babylon’s judgment. Superiority and self-sufficiency are deadly. The kings, merchants, and tradesmen, sailors, and passengers will mourn her destruction. The fall will be quick and heaven will rejoice.

The return of Jesus will be the pinnacle of all that has taken place to that point, because he is the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (19:16). Following his return will be the capture and binding of Satan, the Millennial Reign of Jesus, Satan’s final defeat, and the final judgment at the Great White Throne (20:1-15).

The return of Jesus is certain, and it will be sudden. He is our blessed hope. While we await his return, we should seek to grow in our faith in him, be faithful in sharing the good news with others, and anticipate the time yet to come.

DECEMBER 30

Revelation 21:1-22:5



WE AWAIT THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH, WHEN THE FIRST HEAVEN AND THE FIRST EARTH WILL HAVE PASSED AWAY.

There is so much to look forward to for God's people. Most of all, we anticipate dwelling with God forever! The new heaven and the new earth will be a magnificent place. The new Jerusalem will be the centerpiece of it all.

"The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement" (21:16-17). The new Jerusalem will be a massive city, inhabited by the redeemed of God. There will be no need for the sun or moon there to shine because the glory of God will provide the light! The gates will never be closed, and nothing unclean will ever enter it.

In the middle will flow the river of the water of life, flowing from God's throne (22:1). God will receive worship day and night forever. The servants of God will see the face of God and reign forever and ever with God. What a privilege it will be to serve God in a sin free environment, just as God's original creation was intended to be.

There is a longing in the heart of every believer for the eternal home. When we are in Christ, we sense that there is something much greater awaiting us. We, like Abraham, are to live in anticipation of the eternal city whose builder and maker is God. Do you live with that type of hope? Do you long for your eternal home? As magnificent as Scripture's description of it is, it will be overwhelmingly magnificent in person.

DECEMBER 31

Revelation 22:6-21



THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE PROMISED A BLESSING FROM JESUS. “AND BEHOLD, I AM COMING SOON. BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO KEEPS THE WORDS OF THE PROPHECY OF THIS BOOK” (22:7).

Jesus is coming soon, and we should strive to keep his words. The Alpha and Omega is coming again in judgment. Those who are washed in the righteousness of Jesus will have the right to the tree of life and enter the city by the gates (22:14). All who are not, will be left outside.

The book concludes the way it began, with the promise of a blessing for those who pay attention to what it teaches. In light of the words of Jesus, we should endeavor to live for what will last. Turn to Christ for salvation, live to make him known, and anticipate his return.

Adding to or taking away from the Word of God will result in punishment from God. We must be careful not to dilute or pervert the Word of God. If the person who corrupts the teaching is lost, they will have no part in the blessings of God. If the person is a believer, they will lose privilege in the kingdom to come.

Jesus says, “Surely I am coming soon” (22:20). Yes! “Come, Lord Jesus!” We long for and await your return. In this broken and dark world, we look forward to the return of the light of the world, and when he will make all things new.

Grace has the final word! “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen” (22:21). We are saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus. We are sustained by God’s grace through dependence on his Spirit. We will be safely brought home by God’s grace in the end.

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