Plow New Ground

A Year of Daily Devotional Studies

Ed Mathews
DEDICATION

Enormous appreciation is given to my wife, Georgia, for her encouragement during the writing of these devotional studies. She made many suggestions for improvement. Her tireless attention to and insightful evaluation of the following material appears on every page. Words fail to express the gratitude for her patient nudging that did so much in finally pushing this project across the “finish line.”
This book was written for all those who honestly seek to Plow New Ground in their daily fellowship with the Lord. God is the ultimate source of spiritual growth. He supplies grace and hope to all who earnestly seek His face. If these devotional studies lead the reader to dig deeper into the fertile soil of His word, the struggle to write them was worth the effort.

The Lord was central to this whole project from beginning to end. He provided help when “writer’s block” threatened to derail the enterprise. He wants His people to Plow New Ground. The book is as much His as it is mine. I lay every word, every thought, and every page on the footstool of His majesty. My prayer is for Him to use the following devotional studies as He pleases.

Everything good in this book comes from above. Every flaw originated on earth. He who wrote and those who read Plow New Ground are indebted to Him who was behind it all. The author could not have done it alone (anymore than he can live faithfully without the help of heaven). God urges us to get busy, to Plow New Ground.

Ed Mathews
June 22, 2011
INTRODUCTION

Superficial faith is a dangerous pretense. Yet it is quite common. It breeds a sense of false security, an acceptance of shallow religion. Superficial faith gives lip service to God, the scraps of loyalty to the Lord.

Shallow spirituality was rare among the first century faithful. They were “under the gun.” Mocked and belittled, they were treated like criminals. That was hardly a surprise since Jesus was, too. His apostles were considered “the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world,” I Corinthians 4:13. Faith in Christ was a radical lifestyle.

- **Why this book was written?** The following pages were written for serious believers. This book is addressed to those who are concerned about their Christian commitment. The readers are asked to go beyond polite religion. They are urged to look beneath the surface, to consider the deeper meanings of belief in God.

The emphasis found in this book is not new. It occurs throughout the pages of the inspired word. But the effort to “plow new ground” is often a novelty in our time. It is a call to personal obedience, an invitation to drink the water of life more deeply. It is a reaffirmation of the goodness of God, an encouragement to abandon the shores of belief in order to experience the depths of faith.

- **What is a devotional study?** Many devotional books have been written. They captivate the heart and inspire the soul. They refer to the biblical text but give major space to human story. Devotional books intentionally walk in the shallow waters of inspirational thought. They are helpful. They encourage weary minds and sagging spirits. Their value is obvious. Yet the loose connection of devotional books with the text of scripture is equally obvious.

Biblical studies also abound. They discuss complicated ideas. Words are defined. Contexts are weighted. Meanings are rendered. The reader is ushered into serious, painstaking analysis of the Bible. The process is technical and tedious. Only an inner circle of specialists can understand the vocabulary. The enormous value of biblical studies is limited to a relatively small number of people.

Devotional studies attempt to combine the benefits of devotional books and biblical studies. They infuse a daily, inspirational thought with a serious scripture study. The results are twofold. Each devotional addresses those on earth with the thoughts of heaven. Each study calls for renewed action, a closer walk with God. A devotional study is an appetizing diet of biblical nourishment spiced with inspirational thoughts.

- **Who should read this book?** Everyone is welcome to ponder the material. The serious student of the word, the committed follower of Christ will likely find it most intriguing. The supple heart, the curious mind, the willing spirit will accept the challenge and
celebrate the instruction. The book is addressed to the eager searcher. It is a voice beckoning all saints to honor the King of kings, to walk new paths of surrender for His sake.

- **Where should it be read?** *Plow New Ground* requires single minded attention. It demands an alert mind, an open heart, and a quiet place. Distractions must be minimized. Readers are asked to “be still” before the throne of heaven, Psalms 46:10. *Plow New Ground* should be read in solitude, in a place where one can “hear himself think.” Cell phones must be muted, televisions turned off, and ipads laid aside. God wants to meet us in a place of reverence and calm, a place away from the deafening noise of the world.

- **When should the book be read?** Devotional time can be anytime—day or night—whenever the heart opens out to let the Almighty in. People differ. Circumstances vary. Schedules change. The secret to profitable time with God is flexibility. Tailor the devotional retreat to fit personal lifestyle. It may be in the morning, at noon, or in the evening. It may be multiple times scattered throughout the day. The important thing is to set aside a sacred interlude and keep it sacred. Let it be a time that works best for you. God is on call twenty-four seven.

- **How should it be read?** Central to any devotional exercise is the manner of doing it. Time and place are important. Behavior is more important. People find devotional material most helpful when they read it aloud slowly with appropriate voice inflexion. Savor the words. Feel the emotions. Grasp the ideas. The deeper they go, the greater their effect. Read each devotional study twice. During the first reading, only the comments are read. Then, in the second reading, the passages of scripture are also located and read. The whole exercise can take as little as fifteen minutes. A quarter of an hour that serves as a launching pad, a stabilizing force, an inspiring moment in which God is glorified and the worshipper is refreshed, renewed, and recharged.

*Plow New Ground* respects the Bible as the very words of God. This is why the scripture occupies a prominent place in each devotional study. The voice of the Lord speaks. The heart of the disciple listens. The saint listens because the word of God is a guide to human conduct, Proverbs 3:1,2. It is a permanent record of what the Lord expects of man, Psalms 119:4.

The righteous walk in the way of the Lord, Psalms 119:2,3. His way is clear—as clear as the sun on a cloudless summer day. His word is a light to illuminate the path ahead. It is the road to righteousness, the highway to holiness, the sidewalk to celestial glory.

This book is a serious effort to reveal the will of God in a devotional format. If it achieves that goal, let God be glorified. If it fails, the fault lies in human frailty. Let the reader put his hand to the plow and not look back.
January 1

“Break up your unplowed ground,” Hosea 10:12.

There is only one, true God, Deuteronomy 4:35,39. Israel was to live in single minded devotion to Him. Then all the people on earth would know that the Lord was God, I Kings 8:59,60. If she failed in this assignment, her “cause” (or purpose) would lose its meaning. And the world would have no knowledge of its Maker.

Sadly, in spite of the kindness of the Lord, Israel “planted wickedness and reaped evil,” Hosea 10:13. She depended on herself, followed her own inclinations. A final appeal to fulfill her destiny was issued. In effect, the prophet said, “Plow new ground!”

Beyond a call to obey, the words of Hosea pointed to the amazing love of God. Israel had ignored the Lord. She marched blindly toward destruction. Time was running out. God offered her another chance. The hour of decision was at hand.

- **Seek the Lord.** The love of heaven is “from everlasting to everlasting,” Psalms 103:17. It “endures forever,” Psalms 106:1. But it can be ignored. Therein lays the wonder of grace. Salvation involves divine initiative and human response. The Lord gives. Man must receive. When we do not accept what He offers, He cannot supply what we need, Matthew 23:37.

- **Seize the moment.** Forgiveness is a rope. If the rope is not grasped, rescue is out of the question. Pardon requires action on the part of both the Forgiver and the forgiven. The uncertainty of salvation lies not in the offer of God but the response of man. We must repent. Without turning to Him, forgiveness for turning from Him is impossible.

- **Accept the challenge.** It is difficult to break up unplowed ground. For many folks, weaknesses have hardened into strong habits. Old actions must give way to new behavior. Vice cannot be sown if virtue is to be harvested. The law of reaping what is sown has not been repealed, Galatians 6:7,8.

How can goodness spring up where neglect is planted? The Lord sends “showers of righteousness” on new plowed ground, Hosea 10:12. He “restores the joy of salvation and grants a willing spirit,” Psalms 51:12.

Like ancient Israel, Christians are the chosen people of God. We are “the light of the world.” We should be an example so that others can “see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven,” Matthew 5:14-16. It is time to “plow new ground.”

Kind Father, forgive my foolish ways.
I desire to plow new ground, to live as
Your chosen servant. Thank You for this
marvelous gift of grace. Through Jesus,
Amen.
January 2

“Rise up, O God, and defend Your cause; remember how fools mock You all day long,” Psalms 74:22.

The people of God were facing a national crisis. They had been invaded by a foreign enemy. Their way of life was ruined. Their homes were destroyed. Their temple was demolished. The roots of their religion were pulled up. Yet the Lord appeared unmoved. He did nothing about the disaster, nothing to defeat the intruders, Psalms 74:1-11.

During civil disturbances—riot, coup, or war—humans are tempted to focus on physical safety. But believers rivet their attention on the “cause” of God, Psalms 74:12-23.

• A common concern. In the wilderness wondering, Moses was concerned for the intentions of God, Exodus 32:12; Numbers 14:13-16. Later, in the process of conquering the Promised Land, Joshua was also concerned, Joshua 7:8,9. Would the plan of God fail? Would the purpose of heaven come to nothing? When a saint abandons the faith, when a congregation quits meeting, we feel the cause of the Lord is defeated, His intentions are destroyed? It is easy to give up, to quit under such circumstances.

• An uncommon control. Delays, setbacks, and detours are routine in the affairs of the kingdom. Yet His cause will succeed, His Church will endure, Matthew 16:18. God knows our struggles. He cares for our situation. His plan will not fail, Joshua 21:45; 23:14; Nehemiah 9:7,8. There will always be troubling developments. Our faith will be tested. Our souls will be tried. But God is “faithful,” I Corinthians 1:9. He did not leave His Son in the grave. Neither will He abandon His people, Psalms 16:7-11.

The cause of God is the concern of God. He will bring it to pass when He chooses, how He chooses, and through whom He chooses. This was also His message to Pharaoh.

“I raised you up for this very purpose that I might show you My power, that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth,” Exodus 9:16.

What He said then applies now. He is in control. His purposes will prevail. His word will be fulfilled through us or without us, Psalms 106:7-12. Hence, we should pray, “Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on You,” II Chronicles 14:11. We rely on Him to defend His cause. Mockers will rail. Our faith will be scorned. But the Lord has drawn a line in the sand. Satan will not win. He will not overcome. Of that there is no doubt. On which side of that line do we stand? Are we for Him or against Him? Will we follow the devil or will we stand with the Lord? Matthew 12:30.

Father, remind me that I am not more zealous for Your cause then You are. May I not question but believe. For You know best. You will not fail. With humble trust in Your word, I pray in the name of Your Son, Amen.
January 3

“For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him,” Matthew 12:34,35.

Words are the index of the heart, a mirror of the soul. They are an x-ray of our inside, a photo of what resides therein. The heart is like a reservoir. The mouth is its spillway. The heart holds much but, when it is full, the excess is carried off in speech, Matthew 15:18. What is in comes out. What gushes out reveals what is in.

• **Source of speech.** Conversation is determined by two factors: the content and the capacity of the heart. Since there is no one good but God, Mark 10:18, our speech is good only as God dwells abundantly in us. We speak out of the “overflow.” The apostle Paul used the term “overflow” in the sense of a surplus. The word is also translated “plenty,” II Corinthians 8:13,14.

O that my heart might possess
The accents of His graciousness;
That every word I breathe may bless.

For those who mourn, a note of cheer;
A word of hope for those in fear;
And love for all—both far and near.

May it be said of me
Your speech betrays Thee.
You are like the One from Galilee.

Believers are often shocked by the words that flow over the spillway of their soul—words that are coarse, crude, and cruel. Why? They are infected with the spirit of this age, engrossed in material things, focused on secular pursuits. They are centered on self.

• **Choice of subject.** We must choose between God and money, between this world and the other world, Matthew 6:24. We cannot be stuffed with the things of this life and effectively reflect the nature of the next life, I John 2:15-17. We need power beyond ourselves to cut away the evil and enthrone the good, Romans 8:5. Only the Lord can make that possible.

God must dwell in us, must lead us, Romans 8:12-14. He is “the fountain of life,” Psalms 36:9. Through Him we are a “spring of living water,” Jeremiah 2:13. When He fills our hearts, what sloshes out will bless others, Proverbs 10:11a.

Lord, I have too much of this world in me. I surrender all my heart to You. Fill me. Overflow me. The world needs the refreshing water that only You can provide. I beg, through Him who is the Water of Life, Amen.
January 4

“Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants,” Deuteronomy 32:2.

The Lord was aware of the evil Israel was about to do, Deuteronomy 31:21. Moses was asked to instruct the people, Deuteronomy 31:19. It seems appropriate at such times to be blunt, straightforward, and stern. Nonetheless, as reasonable as that might appear, Moses wanted his teaching to be “gentle” and “tender.” What an example!

- Spirit of the message. The Bible is a love letter from God. It should be delivered by a compassionate messenger. The words of heaven are not attractive when spoken in a harsh, belittling, or cruel manner. Angry scolding, peevish rebuke, biting censure, and hurtful sarcasm seldom help anyone. Faith cannot be forced. It must be fed. Convictions grow in the soil of loving care and gentle encouragement, Ephesians 4:2.

O for a gentle heart  
No matter what the need;  
That follows the Golden Rule,  
In word, thought, and deed.

O for a gentle heart  
That can love all men,  
That embraces everyone  
Like they were kin.

- Character of the Church. The Lord wants His people to be “gentle,” I Thessalonians 2:6b,7, and “considerate,” James 3:17. Like His Son, we should not break a bruised reed, Matthew 12:20. Instead we are asked to “speak the truth in love,” Ephesians 4:15, to refrain from quarreling, to “be kind to everyone” and to “gently instruct those who oppose” us, II Timothy 2:24,25.

A kind message is most becoming. The goal of the saints is to “proclaim the name of the Lord,” to “praise the greatness of God,” Deuteronomy 32:3. Our teaching fails if we drive people away. It fails when listeners are discouraged by our combative attitude. Fire and brimstone have a place in the judgment. But, until then, the heart of the sovereign Lord throbs with tender affection, Isaiah 40:10,11. He wants to draw people to His warm embrace. He does not brow beat. He will not find fault, James 1:5. Neither should we!

The epitome of gentleness is speaking soft words in rough situations. The more gracious one is, the less he will complain about imperfection in others. The more mature one is, the less harshly he will respond to the defects in others.

Father, in the rude realities of life, I want to be firm but gentle. Help me speak Your message in a kind and caring way. In His compassionate name, Amen.
January 5

“It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, and not just when I am with you,” Galatians 4:18.

Without zeal, religion is drab, worship is dull. Without zeal, the Church is lifeless, unattractive, and empty. Zeal creates excitement. It stimulates energy. Zeal is the main spring of action. Since it is right, when its purpose is good, one can assume it is wrong, when its purpose is bad.

• **Caution is required.** Zeal can be misguided. Without knowledge, it will miss the mark, Romans 10:2,3; cf. Proverbs 19:2. This is especially true when it is driven by unscrupulous intentions, Galatians 4:17. In such cases, zeal can become fanaticism—a fire out of control—causing much harm. We are called to righteous zeal. It is more than noise and motion. It is more than excitement and enthusiasm. It is a burning desire for the glory of God and the good of humankind. It is a fervor couched in a “thorough knowledge of the scriptures,” “instructed in the way of the Lord,” Acts 18:24,25.

• **Zeal is demanded.** Spiritual ardor is always good provided it is truly spiritual, “serving the Lord,” Romans 12:11. Christian zeal should be independent of human promotion: “not just when I am with you.” It ought to be permanent in its influence: “always.” It must proceed toward proper ends: “provided the purpose is good.” It should spring from pure motives. Our zeal must be like the exuberance of the angels in heaven over the rescue of one perishing soul, Luke 15:7. Paul encourages believers to keep their fire of devotion burning, I Thessalonians 5:19.

No zeal. How can that be!
No interest in souls without Thee?
Where would I be, if someone
Had not been interested in me?
Open my eyes, Lord, help me to see,
No zeal for souls, means no zeal for Thee!

Zeal is devotion to and the pursuit of a cause, ideal, or goal. It is the backbone of faithfulness, I Kings 19:10. When God does what He promises to do, it is called “the zeal of the Lord,” II Kings 19:31; Isaiah 9:6,7; Ezekiel 5:13. It was “zeal” for the house of God that moved Jesus to cleanse the temple, John 2:17. We are to have that same commitment to the Lord—determined, focused, and dedicated to the purposes of heaven, Titus 2:14; Revelation 3:19. Let us be zealous for what is good.

Sovereign God, deliver me from being a cold lump of religious respectability. Stir my heart to action. Let my zeal be enflamed by a genuine love for You and an unquenchable passion for lost souls. In the name of my Savior, Amen.
January 6


Who was kidding who? King Saul was bluffing. He claimed he had done the will of God, I Samuel 15:13. And certainly, on the surface, that appeared to be the case. For, when asked to go, he willingly went. His obedience seemed exemplary. Yet the Lord was not pleased. Saul had merely gone through the motions. He altered the instructions of God, I Samuel 15:11. He had the blueprints but do not follow them.

• **The will of God.** The king was charged with “arrogance” and “rebellion,” I Samuel 15:23. It was a very serious indictment. He turned the mission of God into the mission of Saul. In effect, he obeyed himself. Though Saul pled innocence, I Samuel 15:20, the facts made quick work of his pretending, I Samuel 15:24. We, too, are invited to be part of the mission of God. Our call is clear. We are to “declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness and into His wonderful light,” I Peter 2:9.

    A command to keep,
    A God to glorify,
    A sacrifice to make,
    A commission to fulfill.

• **The obedience of man.** Saul was a hypocrite. Are we? Does our life portray a facade of compliance—inward pretense buttressed by outward activity? Are we turning the will of God into the wish of man? Are we merely doing “our thing,” serving ourselves? Christianity requires the sacrifice of human freedom on the altar of divine sovereignty. It demands a capitulation of our want to His will. Genuine saints are “slaves of God,” Romans 6:16-18,22. The source of our obedience is a “broken spirit” and a “contrite heart,” Psalms 51:15-17. The evidence for such humility is doing His will His way.

Empty ritual is meaningless, detestable, and burdensome to the Lord, Isaiah 1:11-17. Mindless sacrifice has always upset Him, Hosea 6:6. God wants us far more than He wants our puny gifts, Psalms 50:7-15; Micah 6:6-8. He prefers that we love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength, Deuteronomy 6:6. For that, Jesus said, “is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices,” Mark 12:33.

We are called to do more than simply claim obedience, to act religious. Our discipleship must start with complete submission. It must be sustained by absolute commitment. It must end in total compliance. We must daily demonstrate a “none-of-self-and-all-of-thee” relinquishment, a self-emptying like Christ, Philippians 2:6-8.

*Oh Lord, it is difficult for me to surrender. I want to be in charge. Rescue me from pretending, from the notion that obedience is merely outward motion. May I do Your will on earth as it is done in heaven. Through Jesus, who shows me how, Amen.*
“What is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory…? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy,” I Thessalonians 2:19,20.

The apostle apparently was criticized for abruptly abandoning his fledgling Church in Thessalonica, I Thessalonians 2:17. He had retreated from danger in the dark of night, Acts 17:10a. Some thought he was only interested in himself, only interested in his own safety. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

Paul tried repeatedly to return to Thessalonica, to visit his children in the faith. He tried without success, I Thessalonians 2:18. The Thessalonians were precious to him. They were his hope, joy, and crown. This passage is a window into the heart of Paul. It is a key to one of the best known and least lived sayings of Jesus.

“No one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and in the age to come, Luke 18:29,30.

The apostle had given up everything for the sake of Christ, Philippians 3:8. He had no home, no wife, and no children. Yet he was richly blessed with an abundance of affection from his converts, II Corinthians 7:12,13; Philippians 4:10; Philemon 7.

• Converts are a source of hope, Philippians 2:14-16. Paul did not labor in vain. His future was filled with cheerful expectation. He anticipated presenting the members of the congregation in Thessalonica to Christ as a token of his commitment to the Lord.

• Converts are a refreshing joy, III John 4. The unexpected should be expected in the Christian life. Sinners repent. The afflicted find peace. The cold embers of past faith are rekindled. Moments of success are times of festive celebration.

• Converts are a valued crown, Philippians 4:1. Spiritual offspring are to the Gospel messenger what a gold-metal is to an Olympic champion. They bring dignity to the long hours of labor. The foolishness of preaching is turned into a “stroke of genius!”

Christians may have few earthly comforts. Their rewards come later. Their dreams, their delights, and their triumphs are bound up in those they present as gifts to Christ in the last day, II Corinthians 1:13,14. Children in the faith are their hope, their joy, and their crown.

Father, forgive me for using the misguided values of this world, attempting to measure my worth by applause and plaques. Lead me to forsake the trinkets of earth so I can gain the treasures of heaven. May my greatest joy be the people I bring to You. In Him, to whom I owe so much, Amen.
January 8

“Do not say, ‘Why were the old days better than these?’ 
For it is not wise to ask such questions,” Ecclesiastes 7:10.

To dwell on the past is to neglect the present. Pining for the “good ole days” reflects a misunderstanding of the ways of God. Servants of the Most High will accept things as they are. They will learn “to be content whatever the circumstances,” Philippians 4:11.

Do not sit and sigh  
While precious days go by;  
Serve Him near or far  
By being where you are.

• **Was the past good?** Every age has its light and dark moments. While in the wilderness, Israel longed for the meat they ate in Egypt, Exodus 16:1-3. They had forgotten their slavery. Moses reminded them that the hardships of the Exodus were of unparalleled significance, Deuteronomy 4:32-34. Israel was participating in some of the greatest events of all time. Yet somehow they missed the meaning.

• **Is the present any better?** To say the “former days are better” is to forget “there is nothing new under the sun,” Ecclesiastes 1:9,10. The flow of history is filled with the appointed, repetitious occurrences of good and bad, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. Though comparisons between the past and the present are possible, it is better to make the best of our contemporary situation. The past is forever gone. The future is still ahead.

There are challenges to meet,  
There are solutions to find;  
Go with unwavering confidence  
And never, never look behind.

Do we really want to go back to the former days—no air conditioning, no expressways, no internet? Life was short. Freedoms were few. Work was hard. In the “good ole days,” there were no airplanes, no vaccinations, no computers, and no cell phones. Come to think of it—were those days really that good?

Yesterday is neither better nor worse than today. The past was what it was. The present is what it is. We are privileged to be alive whatever day it might be. Contentment is the key, Philippians 4:12; 1 Timothy 6:6; Hebrews 13:5. Since we are on the errand of God, every day is good (regardless of the outward circumstances). We should live each day to the fullest. We should rejoice because it is the day the Lord has made, Psalms 118:24.

Kind Father, compassionate God, thank You for providing me life today.  
Because I have put my hand to the plow, may I never look back. This is the time for me to do Your will. As others have been faithful in their day, may I be faithful in my day. Through the One who lives in the eternal now, Amen.
January 9

“Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. Am I in the place of God?’” Genesis 50:19.

The sons of Jacob sold their brother into slavery, Genesis 37:12-28. At the time, it seemed like a good way to get rid of him. However, two decades later their heartlessness came back to haunt them, Genesis 42:6-22. Their little brother had become a great ruler! Genesis 45:4-8. Now they were afraid of what he might do to them.

Joseph forgave their cruelty. With a question, intended to show he would not take revenge, Joseph, in effect, asked his brothers: “Am I God?” or “Can I do what God alone has the prerogative to do?” Genesis 50:19; cf. Genesis 30:1,2. Though a powerful governor, Joseph made no effort to get even, to punish their crime. For, he reasoned, no one is God but God, Deuteronomy 4:35.

How different the world would be if people refused to take the place of God. War would cease. Terrorism would disappear. Tyrants would vanish. But, unfortunately, it is common for people to be enamored with themselves. Intoxicated with their own greatness, they assume positions that do not belong to them, cf. II Corinthians 11:13-15.

- **Theudas** “claimed to be somebody,” Acts 5:36. He appeared to have messianic ambitions. A band of followers clustered around him—four hundred enthusiastic supporters. Theudas planned and schemed but his bluster and fanfare “came to nothing.”

- **Simon** practiced occult arts to impress others, to gain a following, Acts 8:9-11. He called himself “the Great Power.” Apparently he assumed he was an instrument of God. Simon was actually a religious fake, a spurious imposter, Acts 8:22.

- **Herod** had his day in the limelight, too. Wrapped in resplendent robes, he made a vain, calculated, pompous show of his earthly grandeur. His subjects went wild. “This is the voice of God,” they shouted, Acts 12:22,23. Herod was pleased. God was angry. The Lord has always opposed proud spiritual charlatans, I Peter 5:5c.

It is common for messengers of the Lord to be regarded as “gods in human form.” Paul was, Acts 14:11. To yield to such flattery is self-deception at its worst. It leads to unthinkable atrocities. As self-deluded frauds, such phonies “call the shots” without the slightest reference to God. They “lord it over those entrusted to them” with condescending insensitivity, I Peter 5:3a. Satan smiles. He knows that those who dare to be god will treat others like the devil. Their doom is destruction, Philippians 3:19.

Lord, remind me of my mortality. May I always remain Your humble servant—without pretense of being anything else. If there is any glory in what I do, it all belongs to You. In the name of my Sovereign God, who tolerates no rivals, Amen.
“They claim to know God but their actions deny it,” Titus 1:16.

To acknowledge God yet disobey God is to deny God. It is a form of atheism. Spiritual pretenders damage the reputation of the Church. They obscure the light of truth. The faithful are called to live genuine lives, Titus 2:6-8; 1 Peter 2:12.

Bogus believers claim—with pride and confidence—to know God, to understand His will. They say they are fully informed. This makes their denial of God all the more flagrant. For, in truth, they are rebels. They are full of hot air. They are “mere talkers.” Paul calls them dangerous “deceivers,” Titus 1:10.

Pseudo saints must be silenced before they do irreparable harm, Titus 1:11. They must be denounced “sharply” like an ax cutting wood in a single blow, Titus 1:13. Fake disciples do what they do because they are what they are. They live a lie, feign loyalty, and play a game of make-believe, Titus 1:16. Believers are to take hold of the truth. They are to refute those who oppose it, Titus 1:9.

- **Detestable.** A fraudulent Christian is despicable, more repulsive than rotten garbage. He is an abomination in the presence of God, Isaiah 29:13; Jeremiah 12:2.

- **Disobedient.** A darkened heart cannot walk in the light, cannot obey the Lord. The truth is not found there, 1 John 2:4.

- **Unfit.** A pretender is as worthless as a counterfeit coin. He is as impotent as a defeated political candidate. A religious phony is a rejected stone, Hosea 8:2,3.

In the cause of Christ, profession and practice must go hand in hand. If the mind is twisted and the conscience numbed, nothing worthwhile can be accomplished. The world turns away from the Good News when a believer is no better than an unbeliever.

The chief of a local tribe was asked why he refused to accept Jesus. “Christian lie! Christian cheat! Christian not love neighbor! I no want Christian!” he said. Actions spoke louder than words.

If Church members claim to believe Christ, than, whatever the cost, by the power of God, they should live like Him. Otherwise, their religion is unattractive, 1 John 3:10. Though it is good to be knowledgeable, the essential quality of a Christian is consistent righteous behavior, 1 John 3:9. Those who truly know Him will quit their sinful ways, 1 John 3:6.

> Father, I know my talk and my walk must be the same. I want others to see You through me. When they read my story, they must see Your glory. Please help me to be genuine, unpretentious, and true like my Savior. In His holy name, Amen.
January 11

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus, Acts 4:13.

They were doing it again! Though Christ had been executed, the disciples were saying, “He was alive!” As proof, they healed a lame man “in the name of Jesus,” Acts 4:10. The event was overwhelmingly convincing. Jesus was a force to be reckoned with.

- Consternation of the authorities. The disciples of the Lord were country bumpkins—lacking both technical training and academic degrees. Yet, the local people rushed to hear their message. Without professional qualifications, it was obvious “these men had been with Jesus,” Acts 4:13.

Do we live like the Lord each day,
Passing to and fro on our busy way;
So that others in us may see
A likeness of the One from Galilee?

The clergy was puzzled. “What are we going to do with these men?” they wondered, Acts 4:16a. They faced a dilemma: (1) everyone could see that the lame man was healed, Acts 4:14. And (2) everyone heard about the miracle, Acts 4:16b. There was little they could do. So they issued a warning: “Stop talking about Jesus!” Acts 4:17,18.

- Impossibility of the situation. The miracle was not a theory, a logical proposition that could be defeated by rational argument. It was an irresistible reality, the power of the risen Lord, Philippians 3:10,11. The disciples were proclaiming it. What fantastic news! Under any circumstances, to remain silent was like asking the sun to rise in the west, Job 32:18-20; Amos 3:8.

- Urgency of the apostles. In spite of the warning, the apostles continued to speak about the Lord, Acts 4:20; 5:20,21. They talked about Christ because they were irrepressibly compelled to mention Him, I Corinthians 9:16; cf. Jeremiah 20:9.

As an open book for others to read,
Our words and deeds they dearly need;
Will they hear and will they see
A likeness of the One from Galilee?

Can a Christian really be forced to stop sharing the Gospel, to quit announcing the news of Jesus. No! It is wrong to trifle with the truth, Galatians 5:7,8. When we fully appreciate the message of salvation, we will be driven to make it known, II Corinthians 13:8.

God, You have asked me to be Your witness. Let me not wait for congenial times.
May holy compulsion grip my soul. Through Him, who made my mouth, Amen.
January 12

“The Israelites…tested the Lord saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’” Exodus 17:7.

How soon they forgot! How easily they ignored the presence of their compassionate God! The Israelites were moving through the desert under the visible guidance of Jehovah, Exodus 17:1a. They were accompanied by a cloud, a conspicuous symbol of His presence, Exodus 13:21. Everyone noticed He was with them.

Nevertheless, there was a big problem. “There was no water there,” Exodus 17:1b. The people complained, Exodus 17:3a. It was not the first time they were discontent, Exodus 14:11,12; 15:24; 16:2,3. Like us, they often tested the patience of God with their lack of faith, Psalms 78:56; 106:14. They provoked Him, Psalms 106:29. Their distrust was a daring disobedience, Psalms 106:25.

• **Cause of complaint.** Why did Israel grumble? God was obviously with them. Their clothes were miraculously preserved. Manna covered the ground every morning. As a hovering parent, He kept a vigil over them day and night. Still they griped. They complained because His miracles were taken for granted.

> “When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to Your miracles; they did not remember Your many kindnesses, and they rebelled by the sea,” Psalms 106:7.

Likely, it was not the fear of death that prompted their complaint. It was the delay of rescue, the inconvenience of waiting. They were thirsty. Rather than turn to God with thanks, they turned against Him in anger. Their sin became a monument to ingratitude, Deuteronomy 6:16; Psalms 95:8,9; Hebrews 3:8,9.

• **Frequency of complaint.** “Is God among us?” has been uttered throughout history. Saints frequently act like life in the Lord is supposed to be a holiday cruise. To ignore the place of suffering, results in grumbling. Should we marvel if special seasons of blessing are followed by challenging demands for trust?

We want certainty. We request proof of His presence, Matthew 12:38; 16:1. We prefer walking by sight. And, should God comply with our wishes, would we not quickly forget, too? Only gradually, in a lifelong friendship with the Lord—punctuated by repeated happy surprises of His abiding kindness—can we at last know He has been with us all along, Psalms 27:13,14.

> Father, forgive me of my complaining. Trials come so that faith can be strengthened. May I not doubt Your promised presence even to the end of this age. Through the name of the One who stands by my side, Amen.
January 13

“Whatever the God of heaven has prescribed, let it be done with diligence,” Ezra 7:23.

Almost 80 years had passed since King Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Palestine, Ezra 1:1-3. Another contingent of exiles wanted to go home. They needed the approval of the reigning Persian monarch. Artaxerxes not only sanctioned the journey but also offered considerable assistance, Ezra 7:12-16.

What an interesting development! The worship of God in Jerusalem was supported by revenues from a heathen ruler in Persia, Ezra 7:17,20. Moreover, the pagan king told the Jews to do “whatever God prescribed with diligence,” Ezra 7:23.

This was a puzzling decree. Earlier this same king had been less favorable toward reestablishing the worship of Jehovah in Jerusalem, Ezra 4:7-23. Eventually, however, his resistance subsided. Many things could have prompted his change of heart.

- **The human element.** Artaxerxes was interested in stemming the tide of revolt developing in Egypt. If he had plans to attack the rebels, a friendly Palestine on his flank could be an advantageous military asset.

- **The divine element.** This whole episode was guided by “the hand of the Lord,” Ezra 7:27,28. Persian policy became favorable because God intervened. He molded history behind the scenes. In ways the pagan monarch did not suspect, he facilitated the purposes of heaven: “teaching all who do not know the will of God,” Ezra 7:25,26.

Whatever the reason there is much that can be learned from this story. Important truths for our circumstances, significant insights for our situation are revealed.

- **The highest use of earthly means.** It is a great blessing to build for eternity using things in time. It is an awful insanity to neglect doing so, Luke 12:20,21; 16:9; I Timothy 6:17-19. The decision is ours. The time is now.

- **The noblest ideal of earthly effort.** To devote oneself with diligence to the work of God, is the greatest use of life, II Corinthians 12:15; Philippians 2:17; I Thessalonians 2:8. It is the reason for existence, the purpose for drawing breath.

- **The best measure of earthly labor.** The Lord requires things to be done with diligence so that the maximum good may be accomplished. Only believers will see the hand of God at work in history. Only those who see His handiwork will endure the hardships and exactitude of toil here below.

  Lord in heaven. Thanks for moving in the realms of earth. Thanks for the opportunities of human labor. May my diligence be the measure of my commitment. In the name of Him who sits on Your right hand, Amen.
January 14

“I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ, Philemon 6.

Paul often began his letters by complimenting the faith and love of his recipients, Ephesians 1:15,16; I Thessalonians 1:2,3. Hence, to Philemon, he wrote:

“I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,” Philemon 4,5.

The compliment of the apostle led to a request. Philemon was asked to forgive his runaway slave. Since Onesimus became a fugitive—unlawfully leaving Philemon—he accepted Christ as his Savior, Philemon 8-11. Onesimus was now a spiritual brother of his master. They worshipped the same God. They shared the same faith.

In addition to his compliment, then, Paul asked Philemon to put his faith and love into action, Philemon 6,7. Be gracious to Onesimus! Be reconciled to your former servant! Show him the true colors of your faith and love in the Lord! Such radical conduct was possible if grace was fully understood, Colossians 1:3-6.

• **Source of forgiveness.** Tender bonds of love are grounded in a strong faith. Life in the Lord—aided by the empowering Spirit—extends undeserved kindness to those who have offended us, Colossians 3:12-14. Barriers that separated have been torn down by the “demolisher of walls,” Ephesians 2:14. The act of turning the other cheek, of going the second mile is prompted by faith in a merciful God, Matthew 5:38-42.

• **Exercise of grace.** The importance of expressing undeserved mercy is beyond calculation. “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love,” Galatians 5:6b. How can we effectively proclaim grace if we do not practice grace? Emulating the compassion of Christ is a visual aid of the Good News. It is proof that Christ lives in us, Galatians 3:26; I Timothy 1:14. It demonstrates that we understand. It shows that we are committed to the love of God, I John 3:16.

Faith in action is powerful. It reveals the riches of living in Jesus. It leads others to see the beauty of Christianity. It draws people to the Lord. The most convincing faith is a demonstrated faith, II Thessalonians 1:11,12. Actions are more persuasive than words.

_Lord, the Gospel is dynamite. You showed me its real meaning at Calvary. May my life be a living witness of its transforming power. Teach me to love the unlovely, to do the unexpected, to be Good News. In the name of my compassionate Lord, Amen._
January 15

“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it,” Daniel 3:17.

Governments can demand patriotism. They must not regulate worship. When the state usurps the place of God, believers must choose who they will serve, Joshua 24:14,15.

Take courage, stand for the right,
Unnerved in the presence of threatening might.


- Demands of Jehovah. Of course, there was no guarantee they would be rescued. They knew that. “If He does not,” they said, “we will not serve your gods,” Daniel 3:18. Because the Lord has not always saved His people, the words “if He does not” become all the more ominous. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could die. Yet they accepted the death of their body rather than the disgrace of their God.

Trust God, faith is the difference,
Unwilling to doubt His power of deliverance.

We are encouraged to be strong, I Corinthians 16:13; Ephesians 6:10. Even Nebuchadnezzar saw the wisdom in trusting the Lord, Daniel 3:28. A lack of faith is disastrous. Until we know for certain that we are in the hands of God, we will have little effect of the hearts of men.

The driving force behind the command of the king was fear—fear of punishment. Everyone bowed to “the golden image” except three brave men. Though they heard the threats and felt the fear, they refused to capitulate. Their respect for the Lord exceeded their fear of the king, cf. Isaiah 8:13; Matthew 10:28; Hebrews 10:31.

Be loyal, though the furnace is awaitin’
Unmoved by the fiendish threats of Satan.

Faith in God seems absurd. Yet, regardless of the outcome, believers will not surrender, Job 13:15a; Psalms 23:4. They will buy obedience at any price and sell it for none.

Lord, I must make a choice. Your honor is at stake. Give me unbending courage.
May my obedience be prompt and decisive. Though I die, I will live. In Jesus, Amen.
January 16

“They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious,” Jeremiah 8:11.

The situation was desperate. While being told they were safe, the people were actually in danger, Jeremiah 7:9,10. They did not listen to God, Jeremiah 7:22-24, nor His prophets, Jeremiah 7:25,26. Eventually they sacrificed their children to idols, Jeremiah 7:30,31.

How could they do such things? How could they engage in such unnatural behavior? The clergy misled them, Jeremiah 6:13,14. The people were “trusting in deceptive words,” Jeremiah 7:8.

- **Erring teachers.** The conduct of the priests was puzzling, Jeremiah 8:6,7. As a horse rushes impetuously into battle, the clergy plunging mindlessly into sin. In spite of their irrational demeanor, they vainly boasted of their knowledge, Jeremiah 8:8,9. In reality, they did not know (nor did they care to know) about God, Jeremiah 2:8. Through devious interpretation, the priests turned the truth into a lie, Jeremiah 8:10b,11. They were doomed. God would not tolerate such fraud, Jeremiah 8:12. Their punishment was sure. The wages of sin is death, Romans 6:23.

- **Gullible learners.** In physical law as well as moral law, transgressions always have dire consequences. Hence, the apostle Paul warned,

  
  “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore, do not be partners with them,” Ephesians 5:6,7.

A false guide is a criminal. A misguided follower is a victim. They will both suffer the consequences of their error. Let those who teach keep their sacred charge. Let those who hear search the scripture to make sure it is true, Acts 17:11. What was designed for great good must not be turned into terrible harm. The office of a teacher demands integrity, Romans 2:18-24. The place of the learner requires responsible listening, John 8:47.

Genuine wisdom comes from above. The deceptive thought of false teachers comes from below. It “is earthly, unspiritual, and of the devil,” James 3:13-15. It is may seem right “but in the end it leads to death,” Proverbs 14:12.

Are we claiming safe harbors ahead while steering toward rocky shores? Our task is to serve the Lord. That is impossible if we do not listen to His word, if we fail to follow His will, Psalms 85:8.

_God, I am responsible for what I teach, from whom I learn. Eternity hangs in the balance. Keep me from deceptive words. May truth saturate my mind, my speech, and my conduct. In Him, who is the Teacher of Truth, Amen._
This passage comes from one of the great military narratives in the Bible. A few soldiers! A simple strategy! A spectacular outcome!

The story begins with an announcement. There were too many soldiers—lest Israel boast that her own strength saved her, Judges 7:2. Therefore, because of fear, the majority of the army were dismissed from active duty, Judges 7:3.

God was downsizing the troops to undercut any bragging about their victory. The battle plan called for a handful of soldiers to stay “in their place!” No advance. No attack. Just stand their ground. Without a powerful invasion force, God decisively defeated the enemy, Judges 7:8b-21. The whole story is a corrective for our all-too-frequent preoccupation with what we do to succeed in our spiritual life. For instance:

Have we enlisted in the fight to hold forth the light?
Must we face a dying world when darts of hate are hurled?
Will we dare to stand among the few against the foe in clear view?

Yes! We certainly must. Yet embedded in all of these questions is a lurking danger. It is the danger of overemphasis on us, John 5:30a. The story of Gideon, and his brave band of soldiers, takes the spotlight off of man and refocuses it on God—where it ought to be. The narrative highlights the appropriate purpose, faith, and means for living today.

• **Purpose.** Our strength is in the Lord, II Chronicles 16:9a; Psalms 28:7; 46:1. We are conquerors “through Him,” Romans 8:37. But we will be defeated if darkness without God has more purpose than light with Him. What is the reason for standing in our place? We will succeed if His purpose is our purpose, Galatians 2:20; I Peter 4:1,2.

• **Faith.** It is good to know His purpose. It is better to have faith in that purpose. The two are not the same. We can have the right goal yet lack the confidence to reach it. Therefore, faith is essential, I John 5:4b. Sad mistakes are made by those who equate the hopes of their heart—or imaginations of their mind—with the will of God.

• **Means.** Christians frequently rely on material things. In doing so, God is pushed to the sidelines. We lean on human innovations. We trust in academic degrees to equip for ministry. We assume buildings are necessary for worship. They may be important but hardly imperative. A few with God overcomes the many that depend on themselves. The hope of the world lies in the Lord, Psalms 31:1-5. Faith in Him is far more powerful than dependence on ourselves, Ephesians 6:10.

Father, I am not enough by myself. I am plenty with You.
May I stand in the place You have assigned me. Through the name of the Conqueror, Amen.
January 18

“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head, Matthew 8:20.

A religious teacher promised to follow Jesus “wherever” the Lord went, Matthew 8:19. It was a bold commitment. Did he really comprehend it? Could he keep it? Had he fully grasped the requirements of discipleship? Luke 14:31-33; Philippians 3:7,8. Christ did not accept or reject his offer. Instead, He issued a sobering challenge, Matthew 8:20.

• **Clarification of discipleship.** The Messiah was homeless. He did not have a permanent address. He often traveled. He packed light. He was not a wandering monk. He was not a shiftless vagabond. His ministry was merely devoid of earthly encumbrances, Mark 10:21.

Can He count on you,
In spite of the challenge,
To dare and to do?

High sounding commitments are not proof of abiding faith. Jesus was careful. The man was unprepared for the task. The Lord cautioned a hasty heart, Luke 14:28-30.

Can He count on me,
When things get tough,
To go and to be?

• **Preparation for discipleship.** Before following Jesus, a believer must grapple with what is implied. Discipleship is more than momentary emotion. It demands seeking the kingdom first, Matthew 6:33, carrying a cross, Matthew 10:38, and putting the Lord ahead of others, Luke 14:26. No one can finish the journey motivated by unrealistic dreams. The destination is glorious. Getting there is difficult, Matthew 7:13,14.

Can He count on us,
Till the very end,
To act and to trust?

The disciple-sayings of Jesus exposed imposters—separated the grain from the chaff. If He does not do the sifting, satan surely will, Luke 22:31. A shallow faith will not sustain us. It is dangerous to think enlisting in discipleship is a walk in the park. Many believers want the rewards without the sacrifices, the crown without the cross, Mark 10:35-40. But discipleship is doing what we ought before getting what we want, Mark 10:43-45. We must consider the consequences before enlisting. The journey could take awhile.

Sovereign God, Your Son had nowhere to lay His head. It is not enough for me to offer Him a pillow. I must abandon my comforts for His sake. Help me to do what You want me to do. Through Him, who leads the way, Amen.
“I cannot carry all of these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me,” Numbers 11:14.

Leading the people of God can be overwhelming. The crush of responsibility—often soaked in the tears of despair—diminishes the joy of the job. The demands are enormous, Hebrews 13:17.

Moses heard the discontent of the people, Numbers 11:10. He had already witnessed the displeasure of God, Numbers 11:1,2. Moses began to justify himself, Numbers 11:11. Like a father who could not provide for his family, Moses expressed deep frustration over his situation, Numbers 11:12. He momentary lost his robust confidence in God, Numbers 11:13.

• The burden of spiritual leadership. Church leaders forget to cast their anxiety on the Lord, I Peter 5:7. When they get overloaded—as surely they will—they charge the Lord with unfairness. Moses did. He shouldered all the responsibility, assumed all the liability for the childish behavior of the people. It gave him much grief, serious concern, and debilitating worry, cf. II Corinthians 4:8; Galatians 4:19,20.

“I cannot carry these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how You are going to treat me, put me to death right now…do not let me face my own ruin,” Numbers 11:14,15.

Elijah had similar feelings, I Kings 19:4b. So did Job, Job 3:11. To live with failure is worse than dying, Jonah 4:3. However, in each of these cases, the position of leadership under God was misunderstood. There are few things more important to religious leaders than clarity of their role.

• The role of spiritual leadership. Moses was a “servant,” Numbers 11:11; Joshua 1:2,7,13,15b; Hebrews 3:5. Every Church leader is a servant. Their job is to copy the Master. The burden of guiding belongs to God. The task of following belongs to man. The Lord commissions the work, II Corinthians 5:18,19. He also provides the competence to lead, II Corinthians 3:5. Still, we can be certain, the task will be challenging. Courage will be needed. Trials will come. Decisions must be made. Discipline will be necessary. And doubt will hover nearby in all situations.

The Lord does not remove these burdens from His servants. Rather He carries His servants (and their responsibilities) on His back, Deuteronomy 32:11,12. Leaders may despair over what to do. They must not despair over what God does.

Lord, You are the leader. I am Your servant. Reassure me of Your faithfulness. May I not exaggerate the weight of my responsibility. Thank You for carrying me. In the name of the omnipotent One, Amen.
January 20

“Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody,” Romans 12:17.

To “be careful” suggests thoughtfulness. Christian actions influence non-Christian attitudes. Our behavior should enhance the Gospel in the esteem of outsiders. It should make the Good News beautiful, Titus 2:9,10.

• **To honor God.** The faithful are to be good in the sight of “everybody.” They are to do what is right before God and man, II Corinthians 8:21. “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God...,” I Peter 2:12; cf. Titus 3:8.

Let your light be a guiding ray,
Whether in the dark or bright of day,
Because God is honored in that way.

Being aware of public scrutiny is not bowing to public opinion. When the word of God and the world of men clash, believers follow the voice of heaven, Psalms 119:133; I Peter 4:1,2. They diligently guard the honor of God.

• **To encourage man.** Since the world is watching, Christians “walk in the light.” In so doing, they “give the enemy no opportunity for slander,” I Timothy 5:14.

Let our light shine as a show
Of the good we do below,
Which others see and know.

Christians avoid evil and do good. That is who they are, Acts 24:16; Romans 14:16-18; Titus 2:14. That is what they do, Ephesians 2:10. “For it is the will of God that by doing good you silence the ignorant talk of foolish men,” I Peter 2:15.

The driver of a car laid on his horn. Road rage was in full bloom. To his embarrassment, he was ordered out of his car by a police officer. In handcuffs, he was taken downtown. There he was frisked, fingerprinted, photographed, and jailed. After a couple of hours, the policeman opened his cell door. Apologizing, the officer said, “I am sorry for the mistake. I noticed the ‘What would Jesus Do’ bumper sticker, the ‘Follow Me to Sunday School’ sign, and the chrome-plated fish emblem. Naturally I assumed the car had been stolen!”

We must abandon the impulses of the natural man, conquer the temptation to exchange crude talk with rude people, Proverbs 16:7; Matthew 5:9,16; I Peter 3:13. “Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else,” I Thessalonians 5:15.

I am Your child, Father. May I act like it. I want to honor You in all I do. Help me show daily proof of Your dwelling in me. Through Christ, Amen.
January 21

“How long will you waver between two opinions?” I Kings 18:21.

Elijah was called a troublemaker, I Kings 18:17. He was a disturber of the peace among those at odds with the Lord, I Kings 17:18; 21:20. God had demanded worship with an undivided heart, Deuteronomy 6:4, 5. The people preferred to split their allegiance between Jehovah and Baal. They wavered in their decision, I Kings 18:21b. They were “double minded”—an attitude the faithful adamantly denounce, Psalms 119:113.

There was a dispute regarding Jehovah and Baal. Which one was God? I Kings 18:24. Baal supposedly rode the clouds, commanded the lightening, and sent the rain. The country was in the grip of a three year drought. Could Baal deliver? For several hours, the prophets of this idol god shouted, “O Baal, answer us!” I Kings 18:26. Time passed. No clouds! No lightning! No rain! Nothing happened. Baal did not respond, I Kings 18:29. Then Elijah built an altar, prepared a sacrifice, and prayed.

“Oh Lord...let it be known today, that You are God...Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that You, O Lord, are God, and that You are turning their hearts back again,” I Kings 18:36,37.

Immediately, fire from heaven consumed the sacrifice, incinerated the altar. Immediately the people yelled, “The Lord—He is God! The Lord—He is God!” I Kings 18:39. Jehovah was not merely a god. He was the only God—the God of gods!

- **The danger of indecision.** Religious vacillation is a human tendency, Acts 24:25; 26:28. Many people are “closet” believers. They are full of deferred decisions stored away until valueless. In order to make room for more procrastination, postponed verdicts are placed in the “garage sale” of religious intentions. They are treated as cheap merchandise, as useless clutter to give away.

- **The harm of hesitation.** There are hazards in religious indecision—limping between deities. Procrastination fails to do justice to either. The middle of the road leads to ruin, Matthew 12:25. Politics may allow several opinions, but religion requires commitment to One, Joshua 24:15. Jehovah is not a guest to be entertained but a Master to be obeyed, Matthew 6:24. He wants us to “serve Him only,” I Samuel 7:3.

Religious commitment is powerful. It animates the sagging soul. It energizes a sluggish Church member. Strength is gained from single mindedness, James 1:6-8. Deferred decisions do not support determined effort, II Kings 17:40,41. To hear the call of Christ and do nothing—to weigh religious options without deciding—leads to spiritual disaster, Matthew 7:24-27. How long will we waver between two opinions?

Lord, You are God. You do not tolerate trifling. Indecision is a frivolous act, a fatal mistake. I declare my allegiance to You alone. Here is my life. I am Your servant. In the name of the sovereign God of gods, Amen.
January 22

“Is this not what I said when I was still at home.” Jonah 4:2.

The inhabitants of Nineveh were wicked, Jonah 1:2. Jonah felt they deserved punishment, Jonah 2:8. But they turned from their evil ways. God forgave them, Jonah 3:10. The prophet became irate, Jonah 4:1,2. He could not endure seeing mercy extended to wretched sinners.

To Jonah, it was clear that he was right all along. Things unfolded exactly as he expected. The Lord forgave the pagans. The prophet was unhappy. He was focused on his own rightness. Like so many people, he did not grasp divine grace, Exodus 34:6,7.

• **Lack of forgiveness.** We are prone to make the same mistake. We are blinded by our understanding of truth. We fail to allow space for the activity of God. Hence, when others respond, we question the validity of their response. Can their repentance be genuine? Jonah appealed to the law. The pagans responded to a Person. The law condemned, Romans 3:20. God forgave, Joel 2:13,14. The Lord said,

> “If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, than I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned,” Jeremiah 18:7,8.


• **Need for growth.** Whether in the pulpit or pew, everyone needs to grow spiritually. For the old nature can—at any moment—take center stage again. Jonah appeared to be a changed man. He obeyed God, Jonah 3:3a. He faithfully discharged his assignment, Jonah 3:4. He had an impressive resume. Yet, without warning, the old Jonah resurfaced. He was disgusted with God. He quarreled with the Almighty. Rather than accept the repentance of pagans, he preferred to die, Jonah 4:3. If the prophet had made any spiritual progress, it was difficult to see.

What became of Jonah? Did he ever understand the grace of God? We do not know! The book ends with a question: Should not God be concerned about sinners? Jonah 4:11. How do we answer that question?

What is the significance of the cross in times of religious arrogance? What difference does the grace of heaven make in our life? Do we accept others as God accepts them? Or are we modern day Jonaths?

*Lord, I must not think condescendingly of others. It is distressing when the old nature resurfaces. Remind me that in order to have grace I must extend grace. I reap what I sow. Through Him, who does not want anyone to perish, Amen.*
January 23

“I love in the truth,” II John 1; III John 1.

Christians have different opinions. The Church is vulnerable to painful fragmentation. She struggles to find unity in her diversity, Psalms 133:1; Romans 15:5,6.

The apostle John wrote to a divided congregation. He sent two letters (II and III John) to an unnamed Church. Missionaries—who were passing by these believers on their way elsewhere—delivered the letters. The congregation faced a dilemma. Deceivers—who denied the deity of Jesus—were requesting hospitality from these saints, II John 7-10. The apostle cautioned the Church against having such men in their houses, II John 11.

A member of the congregation, Diotrephes, was apparently sympathetic with these false teachers. He refused hospitality to the messengers sent out by the apostle, III John 9,10. Another member of the same congregation, Gaius, welcomed the brothers sent from John, III John 5-8. The Church was dangerously divided.

The community of saints was obviously in crisis over where to draw the line of fellowship. John wrote to them because of his love for them and the truth which lived in them, II John 1; III John 1.

- Correct doctrine. Truth expresses itself in right doctrine. The teaching at stake (in I, II, and III John) was belief in the incarnation, I John 2:21-23; 4:1-3. The behavior of the saints—including hospitality for visiting missionaries—was a witness to the truth, III John 12; cf. I Corinthians 5:9-11.

- Correct demeanor. Truth must be upheld. If it is not, elements of the faith will be lost. However, truth must not be maintained by a hateful, legalistic spirit that leads to bigotry. Truth must be tempered by love, Ephesians 4:2,15. For truth and love are noble companions. They must remain together, II John 4-6. Truth without love becomes stern. Love without truth is mere sentimentality.

Herein resides the key to unity. Differences of theological opinion, cultural background, and ecclesiastical tradition cannot be resolved by forced decision or committee edict, Colossians 3:12-14. Authentic solidarity in the Church must come through love—a cooperation shaped by devotion to the truth in Christ, Ephesians 4:3; Colossians 2:1-3.

Only when believers draw closer to the Lord can they draw closer to one another. Fellowship in love and truth transcends place, opinion, and personality. It embraces eternity, II John 1,2. Life in Jesus contains the seeds of immortality.


*I confess, Father, that the greatest threat to unity is me. I want to be right. I must be kind. I battle to find an appropriate balance. Lord, show me the way. Amen.*
The situation had deteriorated. The people faced an unfinished task—rebuilding the temple. They had happily begun the reconstruction, Ezra 3:10,11. God wanted it completed, Isaiah 44:28; Haggai 1:7,8. But the people postponed the work.

The project stalled for two reasons. (1) Israel fell on hard economic times, Haggai 1:5,6. And (2) their enemies conspired against them, Ezra 4:4,5. The people were terrified, paralyzed into inactivity, discouraged by the circumstances. Therefore, the work on the temple “came to a standstill,” Ezra 4:24.

The people confused their priorities. They concluded that the time was not right to build the house of God, Haggai 1:2. However, they constructed for themselves luxurious homes, Haggai 1:3,4.

Christians face similar circumstances. The economy is often in shambles. Our opposition is formidable. Our efforts seem feeble. What should the saints do? Obstacles are overcome by faith in the remover of obstacles, Zechariah 4:7; cf. Matthew 17:19,20.

When we face stiff competition, our immediate impulse is to rely on human strength. When that fails—as it surely will—we get discouraged. But the solution is not found in us. Listen, again, to the words of heaven: “‘Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord,” Zechariah 4:6.

• **Depending on God.** Israel must not be idle. She was given a task. The hands of man laid the foundation. The hands of man must complete it, Zechariah 4:9. God gave them a job to do. He also gave them His Spirit to get it done. It was His Spirit who supplied the enabling power. Israel had no reason to boast, I Corinthians 1:26-29.

• **Despising small things.** The rebuilding of the temple was opposed from the beginning. A building could not restore national independence, political security, or economical stability. To those who objected, it was not the right time for temple construction. After all what could one tiny edifice do for a country in crisis? Surely a strong army and an economic stimulus plan would better serve the nation!

The difficulties of the project and the differences of opinion reduced a grand vision to a distant dream, Zechariah 4:10a,b. Only proud men despise a puny effort, a little goal, Haggai 2:3,4. All great things start small—trees, cities, rivers, and Churches. That is true of everything the saints attempt to do, Mark 4:30-32.

*Lord, I do not have the strength, resources, or wisdom to complete the work You have given me to do. The task is daunting. The opposition is persistent. I need Your Spirit. In the name of the Remover of Obstacles, Amen.*
January 25

“Prepare your minds for action, be self-controlled, set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed,” 1 Peter 1:13.

Lest a person linger too long on the ecstasy of salvation, 1 Peter 1:10-12, the apostle repeated the obligations for being saved, 1 Peter 1:13-16. A gift of grace has a reciprocal debt of obedience. “To whom much is given, much is required,” Luke 12:48b. The mind must be engaged in an uncompromising pursuit of righteousness.

- **Get prepared.** In biblical times, people wore flowing robes. These garments obstructed fast movement and strenuous effort. Hence, the robes were gathered under a belt, Luke 12:35. This allowed a person to engage in vigorous action. Instead of moving leisurely through life, believers should be energetic—like a person preparing to go somewhere, Acts 12:8. They should throw aside everything that hinders, Hebrews 12:1.

- **Exercise self-control.** The word “self-control” can also mean “careful,” Luke 21:34, “alert,” 1 Thessalonians 5:6, or “clear minded,” 1 Peter 4:7. It refers to steady, sound judgment. A believer must not be carried away by appeals to emotion, infatuated by the latest religious fads. Saints must maintain a settled expression of their faith, 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2.

- **Remain hopeful.** The path of faith can be long and tedious. It includes many trials. But a believer is born into a “living hope,” 1 Peter 1:3. If a Christian lives in hope, he can endure whatever comes his way. Hope knows the best is yet to be. The more clearly the object of hope is discerned, the more eagerly faith reaches to grasp it.

    Our trust is in Jesus,  
    Glad allegiance we give.  
    Faithful to His guidance,  
    In hope we daily live.

Saints have often used their freedom in Christ as a license for sin. The peril is very real, Hebrews 6:6; 10:26-31. Without self-control, the effort of a Christian can be jeopardized, 2 Peter 2:20, 21. The prayer life of a believer can be ruined, 1 Peter 4:7. There are many enticements which make it difficult to maintain a strong, pure faith.

We are encouraged to set our hope “fully” on the end. We are assured of salvation. By virtue of a new birth, we walk in the way of holiness. We are holy because He is holy, 1 Peter 1:14-16. The Lord gives the Spirit to those who ask Him, Luke 11:13. Hope of this kind is unshakeable, fully persuaded of the outcome, 1 Peter 1:17-19.

    Gracious God, You have given me the precious gift of hope,  
    an incentive to live a virtuous life. May I allow it to be the  
    anchor of my soul. In the name of Jesus Christ my Lord, Amen.
In Old Testament times, the people of God offered grain offerings, Leviticus 2:1. A portion of these sacrifices were a “memorial” to the Lord, Leviticus 2:2,9,16. The grain in the offering was the “first fruits” of the harvest, Leviticus 2:14. “Salt” was added to it, Leviticus 2:13. This cluster of concepts—memorial, first fruit, and salt—form a potent collage of symbols.

- **Memorial.** A monument helps us remember. It brings the past into the present. The “memorial” portion of the grain offering reminded Israel that she was the “treasured possession” of God, Exodus 19:5,6. Old ideas were energized with new significance. Is that not the purpose of the Lord’s Supper? 1 Corinthians 11:24,25. “In remembrance of Me” replays Calvary in the present. The memory of a past, historic, life changing event becomes a contemporary encouragement.

- **First fruit.** Israel gave the Lord the “first fruits” of their harvest, Proverbs 3:9. God had a right to all of it. He made a special claim on part of it, Exodus 34:26a. There was danger in losing sight of His general right by focusing on His special claim. For example, Israel was not to forget He owned all of her time while she observed His special claim on the Sabbath. The Lord claims the first fruits of our labor though He has a right to all of our possessions, Romans 11:16. We offer our first fruits in order to honor Him. He accepts that part and allows us to manage the rest, Deuteronomy 26:1-11.

- **Salt.** When covenants were made between ancient people, it was customary for both parties to eat “salt.” They still do. The act symbolized the agreement they entered. Hence, in that part of the world, the term for a breach of covenant is “unfaithfulness to the salt!” The Lord said, “Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offering; add salt to all your offerings,” Leviticus 2:13. In these offerings, Israel and Jehovah, as it were, partook of salt. It was a token of the binding nature of the agreement between them.

Today believers are to be “the salt of the earth,” Matthew 5:13a. They are to remind others of the presence of God, of His covenant He offers to them. This is only possible when we have salt in us.

“Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other,” Mark 9:50.

We have a memorial. We give our first fruits. We eat salt. Our relationship with the Lord is neither occasional nor casual. We share an eternal agreement, “a covenant of salt,” Numbers 18:19. That covenant must not be forgotten, neglected, or broken.

Lord, I savor the “salt.” Our covenant is an eternal bond formed in grace, accepted by faith, and maintaining in obedience. In Him, who owns all things, Amen.
Israel shared a common border with Edom. The relationship with her neighbor to the south was “continually” hostile, Amos 1:11. The animosity between these two countries was without parallel in antiquity. The message of Obadiah is entirely consumed with the scorn that existed between them. Edom betrayed Israel in a time of crisis, Ezekiel 35:1-15.

The prophet predicted the utter destruction of Edom for her contemptible behavior, Obadiah 1-9. The devastation of Edom began with the invasion of Babylon, Jeremiah 25:9. Later, the Maccabees added to her demise, I Maccabees 5:3,65. And, though Edom might have considered rebuilding, the Lord cautioned against the futility of doing so, Malachi 1:4. The Romans finished the annihilation. Edom was “destroyed forever,” Amos 1:11,12; Obadiah 10. Any survivors have long been absorbed into the surrounding Arab nations.

- **The hand of God in history.** Developments in time should not be seen as unimportant or accidental. In some fashion—albeit beyond our comprehension—history plays out according to the plan of God. Yet nations are not mere puppets—dangling on a divine string. They are responsible for their behavior, Jeremiah 32:17-19. The tribunal of God decides the consequences, issues the rewards.

- **The rule of God over nations.** All kingdoms on earth give way to the kingdom of heaven. The Lord “rules over the nations,” Psalms 22:28; cf. Psalms 47:9; 66:4; 99:1; 103:19. The dominion, the power, and the glory belong to Him, Psalms 145:10-13. The choir in heaven sings in celestial praise about what was, what is, and what will be—the sovereignty of God.

> “The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice,” Psalms 97:1.

Despite the doom and gloom of Obadiah, his final words glow with hope—“the kingdom will be the Lord’s,” Obadiah 21. His purposes will be realized, His plan accomplished. In the end, there will be one King, one Lord over all, Zechariah 14:9. Daniel saw it coming, Daniel 2:44. We see it happening, Colossians 2:9,10.

The lesser powers in the world continue to chafe against the rule of God, Hebrews 2:8b. These satanic convulsions are temporary. The world languishes in the grip of the devil. Eventually it will repose in the gentle arms of the Shepherd, Isaiah 40:10,11. We pray for that day. Lord, come quickly! Revelation 22:20. In the interim, before He returns, we serve with confidence. The throne is occupied. Hallelujah! Our future is secure.

> I call You “Lord” because You are. I am a citizen of Your kingdom, a servant of Your Majesty. As You sit on Your throne above, I submit to Your authority here below. With praise and honor, in Your sovereign name, Amen.
January 28

“Jesus, tired as He was from the journey, sat down by the well,” John 4:6.

The Lord was weary. What a contradiction! He sat down exhausted. How could that be? In a context where His humanity was emphasized, His deity was acknowledged, John 4:42. Jesus was tired. But He was the Messiah, John 4:25,26.

As the Messiah, He was supposed to be a mighty ruler. He was supposed to reign over the nations, Isaiah 9:6,7. However, before the King sat on His throne, He laid in a manger. The incident at the well gives hope to the faint. Though they may be weak, they can be strong, II Corinthians 12:10b.

- **Strength offered.** To the weary, this story is Good News. A tired Jesus can understand, sympathize, and help, Hebrews 4:15,16. It is easy for the strong to say, “All is well.” It is easy—but not very convincing. They do not feel the fatigue. Jesus did. He knows by experience what He is talking about.

- **Patience advised.** Why do we get exhausted? It is discouraging. Cannot God do something about it? We lash out in complaint, in frustrated impatience, Job 10:1. We rush to fix it. He tells us to wait. “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him,” Psalms 37:7a.

- **Hope realized.** When circumstances drain our vitality, God steps in to renew our vigor. He steps in if we take a time out, if we stand still long enough to receive His empowering help. The key is in the waiting, Psalms 40:1. His strength comes at the right moment. When we cast our burdens on Him, He will carry them for us, I Peter 5:7.

  “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.
  Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength, Isaiah 40:29-31a.

God “sustains the weary,” Isaiah 50:4a. We do not get tired of our work (though we may be exhausted by our labor). While serving, the saints are invigorated. They do not “become weary in well doing,” Galatians 6:9; II Thessalonians 3:13. The Father “will refresh” them, Jeremiah 31:25.

The experience of Jesus gives us hope. He has walked in our shoes. “He knows the way we take,” Job 23:10. He became tired. He has been there and done that. Hence, we should rely on Him. Then we “will not grow weary and lose heart,” Hebrews 12:3.

My body is weary. My spirit is refreshed. You understand my limitations better than I do. Help me to accept them. Though I get tired, I am happy. Through Him, who sustains me, Amen.
January 29

“Take hold of eternal life,” 1 Timothy 6:12.

Timothy was challenged to live nobly, to follow his faith vigorously, 1 Timothy 6:11,12. The words “take hold” suggest deliberate intensity—like a drowning man grasping a rope. This is not salvation by works. It is evidence of a genuine faith in the present, the basis of assurance for a positive verdict in the future.

The struggle against sin is a “fight.” It has all the characteristics of real warfare. It is a “good” fight, however, because it leads to a worthwhile victory. The believer “takes hold” of heaven now in hope of living there later, John 10:27,28.

A man inherited a fortune and gave it away. His children complained. “The money has been wasted on others!” they said. “No,” the father protested, “my parents laid up treasure below. I am storing it up above,” Matthew 6:19-21. That is precisely the advice of Paul. It is an example of seizing “life that is truly life,” 1 Timothy 6:18,19.

Look around for someone in need.
Though it is little, do a neighborly deed.
Many have burdens too heavy to bear.
But, beyond doubt, we have plenty to share.

If we do not live in heaven before we die, we will not live there after our funeral, Colossians 3:1-4. An old lady was asked if she expected to go to heaven. “I already live there,” she replied. Before taking up permanent residence, we should visit our celestial home. Life in heaven begins during our time on earth, Mark 10:21. The idea that eternity is only in the future contradicts the words “take hold of eternal life.”

- **External pressure.** The practices of the world constantly militate against trusting God, 1 John 2:15-17. Thus, many “wander from the faith,” 1 Timothy 6:9,10. The Christian life is a heroic conflict, a battle without compromise. If we do not trust in the God of heaven, we will surely follow a god on earth, 1 Timothy 6:17.

- **Internal conflict.** Those who succeed in gathering wealth are tempted to be proud. They start with little and end with much. From all appearances, they gained their riches by their own skill and effort. God is forgotten. Others are despised. Their reward is grief. Their penalty is misery here and hereafter, James 5:1-5. It is difficult to grasp heavenly life when our hands are full of earthly things, Matthew 19:23,24.

The counsel of God is clear: grab hold of the priceless gift. Do not let it escape. What was started—when the “good confession” was made—should be completed with firm resolve, 1 Timothy 6:12. Come what may, we must press on to the end.

* Lord, I am determined to take hold of eternal life. I have no intention of letting loose. Prepare the banquet. I will be there soon. In Jesus, Amen. 
Paul was addressing slaves in the first century. The principles he articulated are a proper work ethic for us today. Those employed by man work for God. Whether in public or private, we do not toil to advance our career nor impress our employer. We are engaged in the business of the Father. We do His work. We are ultimately responsible to Him. Our concern is the praise of God (not the approval of man), Galatians 1:10.

- **Working for God.** A human may sign the paycheck but the labor is done “as if serving” (or “working for”) the Lord, Ephesians 6:7; Colossians 3:23. Our labor is for the One who is the “Master in heaven,” Colossians 4:1. Because of who is served, constraint is transformed into cheerfulness, unwelcome toil into pleasant engagement. God supplies a deep motivation, an enduring rationale for strenuous effort.

- **Working for man.** Employees should be busy whether the boss is present or absent, Ephesians 6:5,6. The devotion of Christian laborers is selfless. It is undivided. They do not think of their job description as distasteful requirements issued by a harsh overlord. Rather it is a blueprint for their commitment. They work “out of reverence for God,” Nehemiah 5:15; Colossians 3:22; I Timothy 6:1-3.

We must do our best. We should “serve wholeheartedly,” Ephesians 6:7. We labor “with sincerity of heart,” Colossians 3:22. We work with the thoroughness God expects, with the zeal He demands, Ephesians 6:6. Servile performance is unacceptable.

We are advised to throw our heart and soul into our work. Pretense and dishonesty should be avoided at all costs, II Corinthians 1:12. We toil with a clear conscience in ungrudging and uncomplaining service. It appears as it really is—a job well done for the glory of God.


These scriptures are calling us to honor the Lord in the work place. They are asking us to labor with purpose, to toil with sincere enthusiasm. Our production should be our trademark. Our job should be our joy.

We work in order to make a living, II Thessalonians 3:10. But, more than putting food on the table, we work to honor our Master, Colossians 3:24b. Do we speak kindly of our supervisor? Are we supportive of our fellow workers? The Father in heaven impartially judges our performance, I Corinthians 3:13; I Peter 1:17. The standard is high. Obedience is required. God is watching!

> Father, I work for Your glory. Receive what I do as the measure of my devotion. In the name of my Master, Amen.
January 31

“I know what is going through your mind,” Ezekiel 11:5.

No one is so obscure that he is hidden from God, II Chronicles 6:30. We observe the exterior. The Lord knows the interior—our thoughts, wishes, dreams, and ambitions. We often blunder in our guesses. God knows without error. He is aware of our cleverest pretentions, Jeremiah 17:10.

He sees our crooked ideas, unsavory notions, and sinful schemes, Matthew 9:4. He knows our evil intentions before they take shape in unrighteous behavior, John 2:24,25. God knows the guilt lurking beneath our masks of hypocrisy, Joshua 22:22.

“His eyes are on the ways of men;  
He sees their every step.  
There is no dark place, no deep shadow,  
Where evildoers can hide,” Job 34:21,22.


“You have searched me and You know me.  
You know when I sit and when I rise;  
You perceive my thoughts from afar...  
You are familiar with all my ways.  
Before a word is on my tongue  
You know it completely..., ” Psalms 139:1-4.

God is an infinite perfection. How can we deny His infinite knowledge? It is absurd to suppose that He who created our mind does not know what goes on in our head, Psalms 26:2. Did God make something greater than He Himself can fathom?

- **God knows.** We rejoice in the omniscience of God. We welcome Him into the sanctuary of our thoughts. He is our Friend. We are happy for Him to abide in us. We have nothing to hide. We can hide nothing, Psalms 7:9; Jeremiah 20:12; Revelation 2:23.

- **God cares.** The Lord is interested in every aspiration of His children. He is interested in every honest effort to communicate with Him. Before a prayer leaves our lips, it reaches the mind of God. When we cannot find words to express the longing of our soul, the stammering of our tongue is still understood by Him, Romans 8:26,27.

How insignificant, trifling, and vain many of our thoughts are. Few really great ideas ever rise in our noggin. Still God stays tuned. He does not reprimand the shallowness. He applauds the sincere desire to know fully even as we are fully known, I Corinthians 13:12.

_Omniscient Father, I am glad You know. My thoughts are not out of sight  
nor my weaknesses beyond help. Gratefully I pray, in Your great name, Amen._
February 1

“I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me,” Psalms 131:1.

The halls of academe are filled with those who consider matters beyond their ability to know, Jeremiah 45:5a. The pews are occupied by those who offer easy answers to problems that defy human understanding, Proverbs 14:18.

The desire to know is an insatiable thirst. It intoxicates the mind with incessant curiosity. It can result in aspiring for what is beyond reach. It leads to desiring the unattainable, seeking what cannot be found, Psalms 139:1-6.

Still we are prone to ask questions for which there are no answers: Can God chose not to know? Can He make something heavier than He can lift? Can God outrun Himself? Can He decide to forget? Unfortunately, unassailable answers fail us, Job 40:5.

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!” Romans 11:33.

• Secrets belong to God. The wise learn to be content with what God has revealed. The “secret things” belong to His infinite mind, Deuteronomy 29:29. The psalmist “quieted” his soul, Psalms 131:2. He withdrew from false pursuits. He settled down to the truth he knew. He determined not to worry over matters he could not grasp. He let God be God, Job 36:26. We should concentrate our energy on what is known: what God asks us to be, where He wants us to go, what He wishes we would do. We should leave the rest to the Almighty.

• Reassurances belong to us. A quiet mind is like a “weaned child” cooing in the arms of its mother, Psalms 131:2. The sweet nourishment of life is withheld. Once gained by a mere whimper, the comfort of nursing is denied. The child does not know why. But the first lesson in humility has been learned. Devoid of rational explanation, the little one clings to its only source of reassurance, Isaiah 66:13a.

We are called upon to stifle our pride, to calm our rebellious passions that struggle to unwrap the mysteries of life, Job 15:11-13. There will always be times when divine love does not fit the brutality of the world. We cannot know the unknowable nor solve the unsolvable.

This psalm is rightfully called a lullaby for the troubled mind. It offers a gentle suggestion: “Be still and know that He is God,” Psalms 46:10; cf. Job 28:20-24.

I come to You, Lord, steering my mind away from futile inquiries. You have told me what I need to know. That is enough. I surrender my troubled soul to the arms of Your infinite grace. This I pray, because You are God, Amen.
“The Lord will be awesome to them.” Zephaniah 2:11.

A confrontation with God always precipitates a reaction. Depending on our relationship with Him, we will feel fascination or distress, awe or dread, reverence or terror. This attraction toward (and revulsion from) God is called fear. The cause of fright is the awareness of a higher power, Numbers 14:9.

Humans are afraid whenever a threat disturbs their security or jeopardizes their lives, I Samuel 28:5. The cure for panic when confronted with human opposition is trust in the Lord, Deuteronomy 20:3,4. In fearing Him, we have no need to be afraid, Deuteronomy 7:21. Faith in a caring God overrides the threats of angry men.

“In God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?” Psalms 56:4.

“The fear of the Lord,” then, “is the beginning of knowledge,” the awareness of what life is all about, Proverbs 1:7; Ecclesiastes 12:13. To respect God is to reject the gods, Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:12. It is to know His purpose, follow His guidance, walk in His way, Acts 5:11.

• **Cause of fear.** We fear God because of His overwhelming grandeur, Genesis 28:16,17. An encounter with the Holy causes trembling, shaking, quivering, shuddering, and staggering due to the influence of His formidable presence, Psalms 2:11; Isaiah 8:13. Yet to fear the Lord is a priceless blessing, Psalms 128:1. Indeed, the term “God-fearer” is an accurate way of describing a believer, Acts 10:2.

• **Cure of fear.** The Holy Spirit frees us from dread, Romans 8:15. For the love of God “drives out” the fear of God, I John 4:18. In Jesus, the limitless depth of divine mercy is made known, I John 4:10. If we believe, we have no reason to be scared of Him, I John 4:16. To cower in fear of the Lord is to misunderstand the nature of God. It is to overlook the atonement of Christ.

Certainly there is dread in disappointing God—a dread that leads to obeying Him, Hebrews 10:30,31. It is a grave error to think that Old Testament fear of God is replaced by New Testament love of God. On the contrary, the Church grows by “walking in the fear of the Lord,” Acts 9:31. The awesome presence which produces “fear and trembling” is the foundation for serving Him, Philippians 2:12. What, then, is the difference? The believer dreads losing Him while the sinner dreads finding Him!

You, O Lord, are an awesome God. I bow in reverence. You are my refuge. I have nothing to fear except not fearing You. Help me know the difference so that I may be truly different. In the name above all names, Amen.
February 3

“You have made them to be a kingdom...and they will reign on the earth.” Revelation 5:10.

The death of Jesus was not an accident. It was not a mistake, a random deed of blind brutality. He gave Himself as a “ransom,” Mark 10:45. The Bible does not clarify to whom the ransom was paid. But the effect of the payment is beyond question.

- **It gave us status.** Though already children of God by creation, He calls us into His kingdom, I Thessalonians 2:10-12.

- **It gave us power.** He overcame the world, John 16:33; Romans 8:37; I John 4:4; 5:4. His humiliation is our victory. We reign with Him in His kingdom.

The death of Christ was not a tragic act of evil forces. It was the powerful beginning of new realities. The cross remade human life. It delivered us from the bondage of corruption. We reign with Him who is “crowned with glory and honor,” Hebrews 2:9.

- **Reign of Christ.** The Lord received for Himself the kingdom as a reward for His redemptive work, Philippians 2:6-11; Hebrews 2:8b,9. As co-regent, the Son is seated at the right hand of the Father, Colossians 3:1. And, if we endure, we will reign with Him forever, II Timothy 2:12a; Revelation 22:5.

  In redeeming love,  
  We reign over sin  
  Through the Lord above.

- **Reign of Christians.** The word “reign” is rarely mentioned in connection with believers. It implies an ability to subdue personal passions, a power that comes from “the abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness” in Jesus, Romans 5:17. The power to control sinful desire is better than the strength to conquer a city, Proverbs 16:32. Our rule over sin is our reign on earth.

The throne of Christ is not political but spiritual. His power and His kingdom reside “in heavenly realms,” Ephesians 2:6. Because we are seated with Him, our reign is the same in nature as His, Romans 5:20,21.

Since Christ is reigning, we reign with Him. He “freed us from our sins by His blood and made us to be a kingdom,” Revelation 1:5b,6. Where Jesus rules, there His kingdom is. Where Christ reigns, there we (as heirs of His kingdom) reign with Him. The challenge is to act that way, Romans 6:12,13.

Sovereign Father, may Your kingdom be obvious in my life. Though surrounded by the enemy, I rely on Your power to live triumphantly. Through Christ, with whom I reign and through whom I pray. Amen.
February 4

“I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’” Isaiah 6:8.

The prophet saw the Lord in a vision. He was startled, awed, and humbled. After God spoke, Isaiah volunteered to be His messenger. When humans respond, the Lord sends, Isaiah 6:9a. Believers are sent to deliver the word of God, Ezekiel 3:11; Amos 7:15.

We are prone to think that if we were called we would readily go. Such a statement implies that He does not communicate with us in any way today. Is God inviting people to go with the Good News? Yes! Is He waiting for our answer? Of course! Is He urging us to be His messenger? Absolutely! He is actively seeking our assistance. We are invited to live a life worthy of the calling we have received, Ephesians 4:1.

- **God calls.** The Lord is not dead. He has not retired. He is not silent. He actively invites us to enter His service, to deliver His message. When He calls, we should immediately jump to our feet and do what He says, Mark 10:49,50.

  May His grace help us hear His call;
  May His love prompt our willingness to obey;
  May we go and serve for the sake of all.

During a time in history when the Almighty seemed distant, an anxious young man said, “Oh that God would speak to us!” “Perhaps He is,” a friend replied, “if we will but listen.” Only those who quietly listen will hear. Only those who hear will respond. Therefore, as the scriptures say, “See to it that you do not refuse Him who speaks,” Hebrews 12:25.

- **Faith responds.** All saints are “called,” Jude 1. Our calling is a sign of His grace, Galatians 1:15,16. He calls us to holy living, I Timothy 1:8,9; I Peter 3:9. We are “called out of darkness,” I Peter 2:9. “called” to receive eternal life, Hebrews 9:15. Consequently, we must do everything within our power to be “worthy of His calling,” II Thessalonians 1:11; cf. II Peter 1:10.

A godly couple was informed that their missionary son had died on foreign soil. Instead of grieving, they rejoiced: “We know where our son has gone. We hope God will also use our daughter in His cause.” Eventually the daughter died overseas. The parents remained committed: “If only we had a thousand more children to give to the Lord!” If only there were more parents who would say, “Here are mine. Send them!” If only there were more sons and daughters who would say, “Here am I. Send me!”

  O, God, open my ears that I might hear.
  Help me answer Your call—promptly,
  courageously, affirmatively—for the sake
  of Your honor and glory. In the name of
  the Sender, Amen.
February 5

“What knows but that you have come..., for such a time as this?” Esther 4:14.

Queen Esther hesitated. If she went to the king uninvited, it would be equivalent to treason—punishable by death, Esther 4:11. The anxiety of Esther was well founded.

Certainly personal sacrifice must not be asked of others (nor be made by ourselves) without good cause, Acts 9:10-16. To act in dangerous circumstances requires clear judgment and bold faith. There is a fine line, however, between trusting in divine providence and engaging in reckless abandon, cf. Acts 9:19b-24 and 21:10-14.

The real issue involves who is in control—the king or the Kings of kings? Or, to put it another way, where does human effort intersect divine deliverance? The challenge is to believe in both without knowing which might occur! Daniel 2:16-18.

• **Step of faith.** Duty in hazardous situations is difficult. For, in such cases, there is ample motive for action and sufficient reason for inaction. Yet a high purpose led Esther to a great destiny. Though the text does not say, obviously she showed her faith by her works, James 2:18. Her expression, “if I perish, I perish” was not despair, Esther 4:16. It was submission to the sovereignty of heaven, cf. Genesis 43:14.

• **Path of prudence.** Faith in purpose—human or divine—requires caution. It calls for being on guard against dogmatically stating “this” or “that” is the intention of God, James 4:13-15. Life has design. But, when we try to fathom the plan of heaven, it is best to be careful, Acts 18:20,21; Romans 1:9,10; 15:31,32; I Corinthians 4:19.

> “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. The Lord works out everything for His own ends,” Proverbs 16:3,4a.

God inevitably achieves His purposes in history. This in no way diminishes being involved in His will. We are called to come to terms with reality—both natural and supernatural—squarely facing the issues of our day. The fact that God is in control must not lead to passive inactivity. To be in a position to make a difference, and remain unmoved, invites the reproach of man and the anger of God, Esther 4:12,13.

Deliverance could doubtless arise from another place, Esther 4:14a. Still we must not assume that our inaction is justified, cf. Judges 5:23. In the kingdom, each of us has an assignment. There is a tribunal before which we will answer for the manner in which we encumber or acquit ourselves, II Corinthians 5:10.

_Almighty God, what I do matters. And what I do not do matters, too. I need to know which is appropriate under what circumstances. Please give me insight to know when and how to do Your will. Through Him, who knows, Amen._
“O Lord...give your servant success today,” Nehemiah 1:11.

Nehemiah spoke of the enduring grace of God, Nehemiah 1:5-9. In reference to Israel, he remembered how the Lord had rescued them with "great strength" and a "mighty hand," Nehemiah 1:10. Jehovah had been good to His people.

The exodus event was obviously central to Jewish history (like the cross is central to Christian history). His undeserved favor was proof of His attentiveness to their prayers. Therefore, Nehemiah boldly asked the Lord for "success."

In the Hebrew language, the term "success" indicated a process of analyzing complex situations in order to provide clues for wise behavior. Insightful thinking coupled with appropriate action resulted in fruitful accomplishment.

• **Meaning of the word.** The term translated "success" is also rendered "give attention to," Nehemiah 8:13, "take note," Proverbs 21:12, or "consider," Isaiah 41:20. The idea was to get "understanding," I Chronicles 28:19, or "insight," Daniel 9:22, which helped a person act prudently. For example, in the time of evil, the "prudent" know to keep silent, Amos 5:13. Such insight leads those with understanding "to have success" or "to prosper," Joshua 1:8; I Samuel 18:14,15.

• **Gift from the Lord.** In spite of human involvement, "success" was viewed as a gift from God, II Chronicles 26:5. The gift was always given under certain conditions.

  The endeavor must be good.
  The call of God must be clear.
  The motive must reflect the character of God.
  The method must be right.
  The honor of God must be enhanced.

When all these stipulations are met, then, as a divine gift, the providence of heaven will provide the opportunity to move ahead. The critical issue is discerning the providence of God. David, in the cave at En Gedi, is a case in point, I Samuel 24:1-7.

All the men in the cave believed that David should be the king. They differed on how that belief should become reality. Saul, the present occupant of the throne, was the obstacle. Yet, it seemed, providence had placed Saul within the power of David, the throne within his grasp. His companions advised him "to go for it!" How much clearer could it be? Still David resisted. He chose the way of God over the way of men. That is the secret of success, the gift of God for prudent behavior, Nehemiah 2:20a.

Father, success is an important concept in my culture. Your word provides a map to follow. May I faithfully pursue Your instructions over and above my ambitions. In Him, who always succeeds, Amen.
When the Church sent Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, Acts 13:1-3, she committed them “to the grace of God,” Acts 14:26. In effect, their trip began with the acknowledgement that they were inadequate for the task ahead. And, later, upon returning home, they gathered the Church together and reported all “that God had done” through them, Acts 14:27. Christian servants are tools in the hands of the Carpenter.

The word “committed” meant “to be handed over to the control of another.” For instance, Jesus was “handed over” by Judas to the Sanhedrin, Mark 14:10,11, “handed over” by the Jewish high court to Pilate, Mark 15:1, “surrendered” by Pilate to the will of the mob, Luke 23:23-25, and finally, “handed over” by Pilate to the soldiers for execution, Mark 15:15. The term had a similar sense of “giving” or “handing over” sinners to the devices of satan, I Corinthians 5:4,5; I Timothy 1:20. The idea, then, was to be put under the control of someone else, Acts 7:42; Romans 1:24; Ephesians 4:19.

• **Handed over to God.** To be “handed over to the control of another” is a true description of all believers. They are the conduit through which divine grace works. In the final analysis, our life is His life, our service is His service, and our success is His success. This is not merely semantics. It is reality, Romans 12:1.

• **Handed over to serve.** The true meaning of ministry is being placed at the disposal of God. Unfortunately, the one who serves frequently regards himself as first in importance. The will of God, the purpose of the serving, the advance of the kingdom become secondary. Concern for human comfort and safety smothers genuine commitment to the grace of God. Is not His grace sufficient for us? II Corinthians 12:9,10.

In serving the Lord (which will likely demand the sacrifice of something), can God carry out His mission through believers who assume that their priorities and their interests come first?

> “If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me,” Mark 8:34.

The servants of God are expendable, Mark 8:35. They were not purchased by the precious blood of Christ for their comfort and security. Jesus enlists men and women into His service not to preserve them but to sacrifice them, II Corinthians 12:15a; Philippians 2:17; I Thessalonians 2:8,9; II Timothy 4:6. Without such a commitment to the grace of God, we can attend Church but not be tools in the hands of the Master. We can wish the world was redeemed but not allow God to use us to redeem the world.

> Lord, commitment to Your grace is an awesome request. The altar is not comfortable. Expendability is not attractive. Nevertheless, treat me like Your Son who was handed over. In Jesus name, Amen.
February 8

“The fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure,” Isaiah 33:6.


The Assyrians had devastated “all the fortified cities of Judah,” Isaiah 36:1. The land was in shambles. The vineyards were ruined. The grain fields were destroyed. The silver and gold were plundered, II Kings 18:13-15. Nonetheless, the “destroyer” was about to be “destroyed,” Isaiah 33:1.

In spite of his power and pride, Assyria was doomed. He had come to Jerusalem to strike the final blow. Instead, he, who insulted God, was humiliated by God, II Kings 19:35,36. When the Assyrians were forced to “flee,” the inhabitants of the holy city ran throughout the deserted enemy camp “harvesting” the spoils, Isaiah 33:4.

The attackers of Judah were defeated because they were arrogant, II Kings 19:9-13. They insulted the One who “made heaven and earth,” II Kings 19:14-16. The Lord delivered Israel from the hands of the Assyrians so that all kingdoms on earth would know that the Jehovah alone is God, II Kings 19:17-19; cf. II Chronicles 31:20-23.

- **Respect for God.** The best treasure of a nation is her reverence for God, Exodus 20:20; Psalms 34:7. People who submit to the Lord have the key to riches—riches beyond purple mountains, ripened grain, and fruited plains, Isaiah 33:15,16.

  “The Lord is our judge...lawgiver...king; it is He who will save us,” Isaiah 33:22.

- **Salvation of God.** The true wealth of any nation is the “salvation, wisdom, and knowledge” in her that comes from above. The key to this treasure is respect for the Lord, Isaiah 33:6. Without reverence for Him, the most eloquent constitution, the most elaborate system of justice, the most vehement patriotism, the most honored institutions of learning will soon be “weighted and found wanting.”

No military defense of any kind—regardless of how strong or abundant—will save a society that has given itself to that which is false and foul. Defeat is only a matter of time, Isaiah 30:12-14. The true prosperity of a nation is its reverence for God, Psalm 33:12-19. Unless this truth cleanses the hearts and regulates the lives of citizens, the inhabitants of that country live in a fools’ paradise, Proverbs 1:7.

O God, You have been good to my nation. However, I am convinced that she relies on bombs and bullets, on treasures and treaties. How silly! I pray that the government may submit to Your sovereignty. In the name of the Lord of lords, Amen.
February 9

“No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God,” Hebrews 5:4.

Service in the Church must not be seen as a way of making a livelihood. It is a gift of grace. Ministry must not be treated as employment. It is an honor bestowed by God. The first qualification for kingdom work is the call of heaven. Otherwise the prerequisite for ministry is questionable. The Lord alone has the prerogative to enlist volunteers.

His call comes down from above,
Inviting us to demonstrate servant love.

• The commission. Ministry is not a career. It is an appointment issued by God. It is a calling in the true sense of that word. Like the selecting of His apostles, the Lord choose us rather than our choosing Him, John 15:16. To think otherwise has disastrous consequences, Numbers 3:10; cf. Numbers 16:1-49; II Chronicles 26:16-21. Ministry is not an office to be taken but a responsibility to be accepted.

None must serve because they will,
All must hear Him calling still.

• The choice. The awareness of being chosen by God—instead of merely credentialed by men—is a source of courage in trying times. It is a safety net against the temptation of pride, I Corinthians 1:26-29. Servants must be free of personal ambition and self-importance, Luke 14:11. Jesus did not own property. He lived without the approval of those in power. But He had no need of them! For children of the King do not waste their energy securing what they already possess.

He offers more than gilded crown,
Power, position, or earthly renown.

• The call. To call, invite, or summons was a common expression in the first century. God “called” His Son, Matthew 2:15. He “called” mankind to Himself, Romans 8:30. He “called” us into His kingdom, I Thessalonians 2:12, and to eternal life, I Timothy 6:12. An ordinary word was given extraordinary meaning—the Lord inviting human beings to participate “in matters related to God,” Hebrews 5:1.

Because our ears are often closed, our minds preoccupied, and our wills already set, the Lord issued a caution: “He who has ears, let him hear,” Matthew 11:15. Are we listening? No one has a rightful claim to serve in the Church apart from the call of God. Blessed are those who are chosen, Psalms 65:4a.

You gave me ears, Lord. I want to hear You. Keep calling. Tell me what to do. I am Your servant. In Him, who always did what He was asked to do, Amen.
February 10

“It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord,” Lamentations 3:26.

To wait for the Lord is to resign oneself to His will, to submit to His control. It implies waiting without complaining. “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him,” Psalms 37:7; 40:1; 130:5,6. It is good to wait (though it is not easy), Romans 8:24,25.

- **Waiting tests faith.** When an answer to prayer is deferred, the genuineness, depth, and endurance of our faith is measured, Isaiah 38:12-14.

- **Waiting builds strength.** If the timid in faith were helped the moment they ask for assistance, they would become intolerably spoiled, Habakkuk 3:16.

- **Waiting aids understanding.** While waiting, the faithful search their hearts in silence for the meaning of salvation, Psalms 4:4.

There is a reward in waiting. “In quietness and trust is your strength,” Isaiah 30:15. The Lord is good to those who wait. He promises to bless them, Psalms 30:5. Through the years, the saints have found it to be so. Patient believers are delivered from their troubles. Those who wait will see “the salvation of the Lord,” cf. Isaiah 7:3-9.

- **Significance of waiting.** The word for “wait” can also be translated “hope,” Lamentations 3:21,29. In the Lord, there is quiet, unquenchable optimism. In Him, the saints look forward to His purposes being fulfilled, Job 8:7. It requires an unswerving recognition. We are not the masters of our fate. We rest our hope in Jehovah God.

- **Challenge of waiting.** If our waiting is to be blessed, we must be “quiet.” Impatience weakens faith. It blinds the believer to providence. It is difficult to be quiet. We grow restless. We fret under the lash of life. It is hard to wait. We would rather work (since work keeps us occupied). Unless we are quiet, however, we will fail to hear the whisper of God. We will miss seeing His presence in our life, Isaiah 32:16-20. Jehovah can save if we patiently wait for Him, place our well being in His care, and proceed to serve Him quietly. Life is like an airplane ride. God is the pilot. We must not grab the controls. An “I-will-take-it-from-here” attitude is foolhardy. We must put our confidence in Him, be seated, and wait. Could anything be clearer?

So it is in our spiritual life. We cannot shorten the journey or alter the circumstances of the trip. But we can put our life in the hands of the Captain. He will carry us to safety. Quiet waiting is the secret, Psalms 27:13,14; Isaiah 30:18; Titus 2:11-13.

Merciful God, my hope rests in You. Your compassion is not temporary or erratic. I need not sink into despair. I quietly wait for Your salvation. In the name of my Captain, who pilots me, Amen.
February 11

“Your meetings do more harm than good,” I Corinthians 11:17.

It was common in the first century Mediterranean world for people to form political associations, social clubs, and labor unions. These groups frequently shared a meal. Their meals were often shameful spectacles of discord and debauchery.

The early Church also had meals together. They called them “love feasts.” Today we call them “pot lucks.” The Lord’s Supper was often celebrated while eating a love feast. Like the first communion in the upper room, the brethren partook of spiritual food “while eating” a physical meal, Matthew 26:26.

• **Love feasts.** The Corinthian Church came “together” for corporate worship, I Corinthians 11:18,20,33,34. The gathering provided participants with an opportunity to love one another. But, when the Corinthians met, there was discord among them. The apostle Paul was concerned.

  “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God,” I Corinthians 10:31.

• **Hate feasts.** Sometimes Church members belonged to a political association, social club, or labor union. They frequently brought their secular attitudes into the Church, II Peter 2:13; Jude 12. They reinforced the walls of social prejudice in the Christian assembly, I Corinthians 11:18. They celebrated a love feast in hateful division.

The word translated “division” is also rendered “party,” Acts 5:17; 15:5, “sect,” Acts 24:14; 28:22, “faction,” Galatians 5:20, and “heresy,” II Peter 2:1. The Church is a body with many members. She has only one Head. The Church is a diverse organism. She should have no divisions, I Corinthians 12:12,13. Factions must be healed. Discord must be corrected. She must reflect His nature if she is to be His Church.

Evidently class consciousness (or economic status) in Corinth became the standard for fellowship. People of similar social standing ate together in exclusion of others. As a result, a feast that should have demonstrated loving integration was in reality a display of hateful segregation. Some people were left hungry. Other people got drunk, I Corinthians 11:21. The Corinthians behaved like heathens. How could such a gross travesty be complemented? It would be better for them to eat at home, I Corinthians 11:22.

The communion must be a unity meeting, a prelude of heaven, Luke 13:29. The Lord’s Supper should reflect the beauty of Jesus’ advice, Luke 14:12-14. Then the kingdom will dwell among men. Then the Church will be what God intended her to be.

*The world is watching. May my conduct reflect my citizenship in heaven. I want to be a child of the kingdom. Through Him, who prayed for unity, Amen.*
February 12


That which looks impossible may be possible. Faith is the difference. A century ago people only dreamed of running a four minute mile, walking on the moon, or flying at the speed of sound. Of course, there are limits to what humans can do. But frequently those barriers are created before such a challenge is even attempted.

Jesus and His disciples lived in a country occupied by foreign troops. Abuses were common. Tension exploded daily in violent reactions, Luke 17:1,2. Yet the Lord said forgiveness should have no limits, Luke 17:3,4.

Everyone is aware of the havoc sin causes. Only saints can forgive and forgive and forgive and forgive some more, Matthew 18:21-35. Such graciousness comes from laying aside grudges. It comes from dissolving resentments. Forgiveness flows from looking at an offender with healing compassion. When we are aware of our own need for pardon, we more readily extend pardon to others, Matthew 6:12; Luke 6:37. Failing to forgive breeds bitterness. The door of grace is slammed shut. Engaging in lawsuits, insisting on our rights, and destroying human dignity become the norm, I Corinthians 6:1,2.

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you,” Ephesians 4:32.

The promise of mercy sounds good, Matthew 5:7; James 2:12,13. But the exercise of unlimited forgiveness looks impossible. What is a person to do? The disciples turned to Jesus: “Increase our faith,” they begged, Luke 17:5.

- **Starting where we are.** Obviously they already had some faith. But they needed more. They believed Jesus could help. An increase in faith was desirable. The disciples had the right idea. They asked the right Person, Matthew 19:26.

- **Using what we have.** The disciples believed. They needed help to overcome their unbelief, Mark 9:24. Though their faith was small, they could do great things “if” they used it. Remarkably, these men could have ordered mulberry trees to be planted in the sea (where, presumably, the trees would continue to grow). And, wonder of wonders, the trees would obey them, Luke 17:6.

The disciples could forgive. They could also plant the Church in pagan territory where few thought she could grow. A gigantic faith was not necessary, Matthew 21:18-22. Ordinary saints could do extraordinary things **IF THEY USED THE FAITH THEY ALREADY HAD,** Matthew 17:14-21.

*Compassionate Father, I am not a mountain mover. The challenge of unlimited forgiveness seems overwhelming. Nonetheless, I believe. Help my unbelief. In Him, who showed me how to forgive, Amen.*
February 13

“He did what was right…but not wholeheartedly,” II Chronicles 25:2.

Amaziah was halfhearted in his allegiance to the Lord, mediocre in his obedience. For example, in executing the assassins of his father, he showed restrain in deference to the law of God, II Kings 14:5,6; cf. Deuteronomy 24:16. Nevertheless, later, after his victory on the battlefield, he consulted the Edomite gods, II Chronicles 25:14,15.

Obviously king Amaziah was double minded. He followed the advice of the prophet of God on one occasion, II Chronicles 25:7-10. But, a short time later, he rejected a warning from the messenger of God, II Chronicles 25:16.

Like us, Amaziah was a chameleon. He had his moments of fidelity and his times of foolishness. He had a respect for God, knew the scriptures, and did what was right on his better days. He was also arrogant and proud, blinded by the seductive glitter of worldly success, II Chronicles 25:19. His epithet was quite correct: “He did what was right…but not wholeheartedly,” II Chronicles 25:2.

Will the Master call us faithful
When our fleeting day is done?
Yes! With wholehearted service,
The crown of life will be won.

• A common condition. It is good when weakness is modified by the redeeming features of strength. It is good when our coarser traits are softened by the finer qualities of character, I Kings 22:43. One could wish it was always so, I Kings 8:56-61. But goodness is often mixed with badness, favorable aspects of personality tarnished by unworthy behavior, I Kings 15:14.

• A dangerous position. A description of the double minded underscores the danger. They are erratic and unreliable, uncertain and unstable, James 1:5-8. The terms indecisive and changeable apply as well, I Kings 11:4. This fickleness is the downfall of many promising lives: THEY DO WHAT IS RIGHT BUT NOT WHOLEHEARTEDLY.

The overriding mistake of Amaziah—and those like him—is a failure to yield completely to the Lord. Piety is fragmentary. The point is never reached where it can be said, “I no longer live” but the Lord lives in me, Galatians 2:20. Our devotion is superficial and partial. There are dire consequences when we do not fully surrender, I Chronicles 28:9. We must crucify ourselves. Otherwise, we will discover—in a faith-testing crisis—a weakened resolve, the loss of a long sought reward, II John 8.

You know, gracious Lord, that I live with a reluctance to relinquish, to rely solely on You, to yield completely in faith.
May I do right with my whole heart. In Him, who surrendered everything. Amen.
February 14

“Prepare to meet your God,” Amos 4:12.

The highway sign on a dangerous curve read: PREPARE TO MEET YOUR GOD. The purpose of the sign was to get motorists to slow down. It was usually ignored. People thought it was a quaint, comical roadside message. Few paid any attention. Almost everyone neglected its implications.

Amos summoned Israel to get ready to stand before the Lord. There was no way to dodge the consequences of her empty pretensions. However, should she judge herself, there would be no need for His judgment, I Corinthians 11:31. Israel must weight her ways. She should “seek” the Lord immediately, Amos 5:4-6. He is the One who formed the mountains and revealed His thoughts to men, Amos 4:13; cf. Jeremiah 17:10. He is the One to whom humankind is accountable, Ecclesiastes 12:13,14. Who can resist Him? Who can avoid the day of reckoning? Romans 14:11,12.

Previously there had been several acts of divine judgment. They were warnings. Israel must “return to the Lord,” Amos 4:6-11. Yet she did not see the precariousness of her situation. Her troubles were roadside messages of impending disaster. How could she ignore them? Why did she choose to blindly speed ahead? Amos was the voice of the Lord: “Because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God.”

• **Judgment is inevitable.** The reality of meeting God was a fact that must be faced, Acts 17:30,31; II Corinthians 5:10. There was no escape, Psalms 139:7-12.

  (God comes) *to the help of those who gladly do right... But when we continue to sin..., how can we be saved?* Isaiah 64:5.

• **Preparation is necessary.** Though the meeting before God is inevitable, it need not be abominable. God invites men to meet Him. He wants to bless those who are dressed for the occasion, Psalms 119:71.

• **Blessing is possible.** It was not too late to repent. Until judgment is rendered, the sentence of doom is a call to repentance. God spared Nineveh after sentencing her to destruction, Jonah 3:4-10. He healed Hezekiah after announcing his death, Isaiah 38:1-5. For, in part, what God does, is contingent on what humans do. A threatening proclamation is a message of mercy until it is carried out, Amos 5:14,15.

The wicked say to Him, “Leave us alone!” Job 21:14; 22:17. How futile! Ready or not the confrontation will come. The meeting will happen. It is time to set things in order, Isaiah 55:6,7. Consequently, the prophet warned: PREPARE TO MEET YOUR GOD!

Oh Lord, righteous Judge, I have been duly warned. It is too late to dig a well after the house is on fire. I repent. I cast my destiny on Your gracious pardon. Forgive me. Through my merciful God, Amen.
February 15

“My name will be great among the nations,” Malachi 1:11.

This statement must have stunned the Jews. It was outrageous. The Jews were supposed to serve as “a light for the Gentiles,” Isaiah 42:6; 60:2,3. But Malachi suggested that the torch of mission would be taken from the Jews and passed to the Gentiles. Jesus echoed the same sentiment, Matthew 21:43.

The Church today must face a similar sobering reality. If she becomes too cozy with the world, she will see the baton of her spiritual heritage passed to another. Our forefathers in the faith rested on their laurels. The Lord told them He had “other sheep” which were not among the flock of Israel, John 10:16. Why did the chosen people lose their special status with God? The prophet Malachi offers some clues.

The Israelites “profaned” the name of the Lord, Malachi 1:12. They treated religion “contemptuously.” They felt going to the temple was a “burden,” Malachi 1:13. They did not recognize the kingship of God. They were devoid of any sense of His sovereignty, Malachi 1:14. Hence, the Lord felt that no worship was better than pretended praise. It would be an improvement if the doors of the temple were closed. Then the people would stop their hypocritical charade. “I am not pleased with you,” God said. “I will not accept your sacrifices,” Malachi 1:10.

• **Spiritual boredom.** When saints become spiritually bored, mechanical worship is not far behind, Isaiah 29:13. Mindless ritual is a constant threat to genuine reverence. No one is so religious that he has spiritual goose bumps all the time. It is a terrible thing when a flagging zeal is acknowledged without blushing. That was the problem Malachi addressed, Malachi 1:6-8. In effect, he said, peace with religious boredom is a prelude to the death of the soul, Isaiah 43:22-24. To expect seasons of dryness is appropriate. To become comfortable with them is deadly!

• **Spiritual lethargy.** The familiar routine of worship can be a breeding ground for spiritual laziness. Regular song, prayer, and communion must not be abandoned. Rather they must become the training ground of the spirit. They must be the practice field for developing a Christ-like character. They must be the preparation room for eternity. The secret for traveling the sandy stretches—between the refreshing spiritual oases—is faithful commitment to the praise of God, Hebrews 13:15.

The name of God is great, Malachi 1:11. He is worthy of all our adoration, I Chronicles 16:23-29. He is the God of transcendent glory. He is Creator with awesome power. He is the Master of inscrutable purpose. There is no God like Him. “There is none other,” Deuteronomy 4:39.

Sovereign Lord, I confess that worship can be a burden at times. I have experienced the boredom. It is my fault. But I refuse to be a fraud. Renew Your Spirit in me. I wait for the filling. In Him, who refreshes me, Amen.
February 16

“Why bother the teacher any more?” Mark 5:35.

Apparently the people thought Jesus could not change the situation. If He had come before she died, He could have healed her. But she passed away. No one assumed He might restore her to life. “Why bother the teacher?” was a sign of resignation.

The question was stated as if it was the end of the story. Death had claimed another victim. Only a funeral remained. But Jesus disagreed. “Ignoring what they said,” He offered hope. “Do not be afraid,” the Lord suggested, “just believe,” Mark 5:36. The drama had only begun. The power of God could reverse the scenario. There was ample reason to “bother” Jesus. He turns hopelessness into happiness, Hebrews 12:2,3.

A widow was weeping in the room where her husband had just died. Her only child asked about her tears. She described their great loss, their sad plight, their bleak future. The child—looking intently at his mother—asked, “Did God die, too?”

The greatest bother for Christ is when no one bothers Him! “You will not come to Me,” He said, “that you may have life,” John 5:39,40. He is frustrated when we are reluctant. He is honored when we ask. He wants us to “bother” Him, Luke 18:1-8.

“Come unto Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest,” Matthew 11:28.

• **He handles the biggest problems.** There is no burden too heavy, Psalms 55:22. He has all power in heaven and on earth. He will not be offended if we lean on Him, John 16:24. The Lord loves the weak. He understands, Jeremiah 29:12,13. To ignore Him is to insult His sovereignty, to reject His grace. When bewildered, He wants us to believe, I Chronicles 5:20b. He will rescue us from our deep despair, Isaiah 40:29.

• **He answers the smallest requests.** Jesus did not condemn the shallowness of their trust. He was troubled by their failure to ask for assistance, their hesitancy in seeking help, James 4:2. If God sent His Son before we asked Him, will “He not...also liberally give us all things?” Romans 8:31,32. If He has given the greater gift, will He withhold the lesser blessing? Certainly not! We do not weary God when we pray, I John 5:14,15.

When we refuse to rely on Him, when we try to go-it-alone, when we reject His offer of provision, He is disappointed. Therefore, “ask, seek, and knock” because our Father (who knows how to give gifts) is waiting to hear from us, Matthew 7:7-11; cf. Matthew 21:22; John 14:13,14; 15:7; I John 3:21,22.

Compassionate, caring Father, You alone can replace despair with hope. You are never bothered when I ask. Thank You for Your kindness. In Him, who is eager to help, Amen.
February 17

“Trust the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.” Proverbs 3:5

The essence of religious faith is trusting God, Psalms 118:8. Because we are dependent creatures, we must rely on something or someone. We are not self-sufficient. Those who know themselves will trust in the Lord, Isaiah 26:4.

The word “trust” means “to rest in confidence.” We are repeatedly implored to trust Jehovah, Psalms 4:5; 37:3; 62:8. We are summoned to a faith-filled life, admonished to depend absolutely and uncompromisingly on God.

While hanging on the cross, the Lord was ridiculed: “He trusts in God, let God rescue Him,” Matthew 27:43. Did Jesus suffer from misplaced confidence? He died praying, “Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit,” Luke 23:46. In that dark hour, it seemed like the scoffers were right! But, after three days, the empty tomb said otherwise.

Trust in God is measured in direct proportion to the degree of leaning on Him. Jesus was the epitome of trust, the picture of unreserved leaning. He was the ultimate expression of faith in God. Confidence comes from trusting the Lord, Proverbs 1:33. Depending on oneself is not adequate for navigating the precarious complexities of life.

- **Leaning on ourselves.** It is easy to lean on our own understanding. We often decide and then ask God to bless our decision. Is that not backwards? Our thoughts are too shallow. In all aspects of life, God should be sought first, I Kings 22:1-5. He must not be limited to special seasons or sacred places. He is not an elective in the school of living.

- **Leaning on God.** Trusting requires leaning. It is basic to the Christian life. We are supposed to lean on Him and anticipate His guidance, Psalms 25:4,5; 48:14. Those who expect His guidance without leaning on Him are presumptuous. Those who lean on Him without looking forward to His guidance are irreverent.

  “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths,” Proverbs 3:6

Life requires many decisions. Deciding can be confusing at best and disabling at worst. We face tomorrow blindly. The future is hidden. We must lean on Him who knows the end for the beginning, Isaiah 46:10a. Otherwise, we move ahead without a guide.

However, when accepting Him as our guide, we must surrender our freedom. Surrender requires refusing to lean on our own understanding. It means allowing Him to take over, to lead, Psalms 23:2; Isaiah 49:10; John 10:2-4; II Corinthians 2:14. Are we following?

\[ O, 	ext{Lord, I relinquish control over my life. You are on the throne. I defer to Your wisdom and anticipate Your guidance. Into Your secure hands I commend my life. I humbly pray, through Your trusting Son, Amen.} \]
February 18

“The voices of your messengers will no longer be heard,” Nahum 2:13.

The prophet mentioned the messengers of Zion. They were bringers of Good News, Nahum 1:15a. He also wrote about the heralds of Nineveh. They were carriers of bad news, Nahum 2:13. The difference was enormous. The heralds of Nineveh blasphemed God, II Kings 18:33-35. The messengers of Zion honored Him, Isaiah 40:9,10.

Contemporary society is cluttered with both kinds: those who curse God and those who praise His name, those who belittle believers and those who call for faith.

The one spoke of submission to the king, II Kings 18:31,32. The other encouraged faith in the King of kings, Nahum 1:12,13. One led to disaster. The other pointed to deliverance. One promised earthly pleasures. The other told of heavenly blessings. Each messenger offered a choice, spoke with conviction, and asked for submission. Only one deserved a hearing.

- **Assyria was doomed.** For two centuries, Nineveh had been the pitiless besieger of nations. She trampled innocent people under foot with prideful gaze and gleeful grin. Those who had glori ed in victory would soon feel the agony of defeat. Nineveh was doomed, Isaiah 14:24-27.

- **God was faithful.** Huge battering rams were pushed forward under a hail of arrows. The walls were breached. Panic filled the streets. Dead bodies were stacked in piles, Nahum 3:1-3. The besieger was besieged, the devastator was devastated. God kept His word, Nahum 1:14.

- **Nineveh was destroyed.** The barbaric nation was crushed, Nahum 2:11,12. “All who draw the sword will die by the sword,” Matthew 26:52. She who spread terror was terrified. She was left “utterly desolate,” Zephaniah 2:13-15. Nineveh vanished like a dream. Armies passed over her ruins for centuries unaware that they walked on the rubble of this once great city, Jeremiah 50:39.

The voices of her evil messengers were silenced. Their frightening news was heard no more. She seemed invincible. Yet, due to constant war and blatant rebellion against God, she collapsed—never to rise again.

“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news,” Isaiah 52:7; cf. Nahum 1:15.

The heralds of Nineveh are no longer heard. The messengers of Zion march on. They continue to announce the Good News. Eventually “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord,” Isaiah 11:9. Hallelujah! May that day come quickly.

*Almighty God, please hasten that day through me. I want to be a bearer of glad tidings. The world is waiting. In Him, who is the Good News, Amen.*
February 19

“Live a life worthy of the calling you have received,” Ephesians 4:1.

When a person joins a club, he is obligated to live a certain way, embrace a particular interest, pursue a special goal. If he fails to adopt the ideals of the club, he hinders the success of the group, brings suspicion and disgrace on the organization. The same is true when a believer enters the fellowship of the Church, Titus 2:11-14.

In the world, unbelievers are kept from wicked behavior by constraints of family, taboos of culture, conventions of honor, and forces of law. How much more ought members of the Church—who are loved ones of Christ—be kept from unbecoming behavior by the grace of God, Psalms 18:25,26; 1 John 3:3.

Ideally, no human is worthy of the call of heaven, the Good News, or citizenship in the kingdom. Practically, however, we can and should, indeed, must, as a child of God, be governed at every step by the ideals from above, Philippians 3:17-21.


• **Our calling.** God “calls us into His kingdom,” 1 Thessalonians 2:11,12, calls us to a holy life, II Timothy 1:8,9a. Therefore, just as He who called us is holy, so we should be holy in all we do, I Peter 1:15,16. Our motivation for such behavior is the mercy of God. As Paul wrote, “I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God,” Romans 12:1. We live worthy of our calling out of gratitude for the Caller.

• **Our conduct.** Christians are called to be the people of God, Romans 9:25, “by the grace of Christ,” Galatians 1:6, “into fellowship with the Son,” 1 Corinthians 1:9. They are called “to live in peace,” 1 Corinthians 7:15. They are “called out of darkness,” I Peter 2:9, “to live a holy life, I Thessalonians 4:7, by His “glory and goodness,” II Peter 1:3. In order to be a community of saints, we must live like saints.

A Roman philosopher said, “It is useful for the public good when people believe themselves to be born of the gods.” Why? In so doing “they will pursue worthy enterprises more earnestly.” Should not such a perception draw the children of God away from what is base? Should it not inspire them toward noble thoughts and holy deeds?

Let us, then, not subject our Lord “to public disgrace,” Hebrews 6:6. Let us honor His call through virtuous conduct. Let us walk in harmony with the nature of our calling.

*Holy God, only the pure in heart will see You. I respond to Your gracious call with uncompromising holiness. My response is a measure of my deepest gratitude, sincerest respect, and profoundest affection. Through the One who called me, Amen.*
“King David went in and sat before the Lord.” II Samuel 7:18.

Nathan the prophet had just announced that God would bless David and his family, II Samuel 7:11b-13. The king was amazed. Sitting “before the Lord,” he prayed a classic expression of humility. “Who am I,” he asked, “that You have brought me thus far?” II Samuel 7:18. How could one of such humble birth be raised to the throne. Why was his descendants allowed to become a dynasty?

His prayer was a confession of unworthiness. Numb with surprise and gratitude, David ventured to ask another question: “Is this Your usual way of dealing with men, O Sovereign Lord?” II Samuel 7:19. David felt unworthy of all the kindness he was shown, cf. Genesis 32:10.

“What is man that You are mindful of him, the son of man that You care for him?” Psalms 8:4; cf. Psalms 144:3.

In the context of his day, David was well aware of the atrocities that often plagued royal families. The thought must have been sickening. Would such horrors, such butcheries be the fate of his children? No! His offspring would bask in the unfailing love of God, II Samuel 7:15,16. Assuredly, any of their shortcomings would be corrected (as a father disciplines his children), II Samuel 7:14. Nevertheless, in spite of such discipline, the dynasty would survive.

- **With humble appreciation.** Little wonder David was overwhelmed. His confidence in the future blessings of God rested on the past kindnesses of God, II Samuel 7:22-24. So the king begged the Lord to keep His word, II Samuel 7:25,26. This plea was not couched in doubt but framed in humility. He prayed as a beggar accepting a blessing—not as something owned but as something bestowed.

- **Before the Lord.** The key to the meaning of the passage is the words “before the Lord,” II Samuel 7:18. It is in the presence of God that we gain an understanding of ourselves, Psalms 36:9. His greatness reveals our littleness. His holiness exposes our sinfulness, Isaiah 6:5; Luke 5:8. In His presence, we learn the relative value of time in view of eternity, the worth of this world in light of the world to come.

Humility is nurtured “before the Lord,” Psalms 115:1. When looking into His face, we are inspired to new resolve and greater hope. The longer we meditate in His presence the more humble we become. Our willingness to go “before the Lord” is the measure of our piety. “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God,” I Peter 5:6.

Gracious Lord, kind Father, I am overwhelmed when I come into Your presence. Before Your throne, my self-importance melts into contrite trust. That is the way it ought to be. With awe and gratitude, I pray in Jesus name, Amen.
February 21

“I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain,” Isaiah 49:4.

Ministry can often be frustrating. Few people respond. Most do not care. The prophet was called while in the womb, Isaiah 49:1. He was to restore the unfaithful of Jacob, Isaiah 49:6a. Yet, his labor seemed in vain, Isaiah 49:4a.

Though rejected by most of Israel, his work was essential to establishing the kingdom of God. The restored remnant (though small) would become “a light to the Gentiles.” Salvation would reach “the ends of the earth,” Isaiah 49:6b. The prophet would succeed, Isaiah 65:23.

Is that not similar to the ministry of Jesus? Matthew 23:3. He made comparatively few disciples, John 1:11; 12:37. Yet His effort lives on. Is that not like our work? We toil much. We accomplish little. But the Lord blesses what we do.

Does God need me when all things are His own;
Earth His footstool, heaven His throne?
Does God need me when my best is so slight;
My ability limited, my success trite?

Seldom do we see the full results of our labor. Still the conversion of the most unpromising sinner can issue into the most astounding outcome. Consider the apostle Paul. History is full of little deeds that produce huge differences in the course of time! Luke 13:18-21.

- **Business of the Father.** The lesson learned is worth the pain endured. The reward for faithful service resides in the hand of the Lord, Isaiah 49:4b. This is as it should be lest the servant seek glory for himself, lest he gauge the plans of heaven by his achievement.

- **Labor of the saints.** Discouragement is common among the devout. It is not their effort which exhausts them. It is the frustration that nothing seems to come of it. Yet happy are those who never quit. Lesser troubles are forgotten in the face of vaster undertakings. Let the flagging messenger look beyond his disheartening past, Deuteronomy 1:12; Joshua 8:1.

We are sometimes required to work without consolation of success. This is so because ministry is His work. Results take time. Human labor is only part of the equation, I Corinthians 3:5,6. He who is dissatisfied in the absence of success may be working for his own praise. As servants, we should be happy to do what passes the scrutiny of the Master—whether the harvest is big or small, Matthew 25:21.

Lord in heaven. Bless my effort. Keep me from discouragement.
My reward is in Your hand. In Him, who assigns the work. Amen.
February 22

“Shine like stars,” Philippians 2:15.

Paul wrote about obedience, Philippians 2:12. It was an obedience that willingly works out the implications of salvation, Philippians 2:13. It does so without “complaining and arguing” while living among “crooked and depraved” people, Philippians 2:14,15.

Our earthly contemporaries are morally “warped,” Deuteronomy 32:5. They are twisted because they are alienated from God. As Christians, we live among them but are not one of them. We shine in the enshrouding darkness of society, Matthew 5:14-16; Ephesians 5:8; I Thessalonians 5:5.

This may be an allusion to the towers in ancient times that were built at a harbor entrance. Fires burned atop these towers at night to guide ships safely into port. Hence, we “shine like stars” so that those in darkness may see light and find life in Jesus.

- **The meaning conveyed.** The word “stars” is the same term used in the creation narrative for “lights.” God set these luminaries in the heavens, Genesis 1:14-18. Since “light” had already been created, Genesis 1:3-5a, the sun and moon only reflected a preexisting light. When Jesus (the light) is in us, we are light reflectors not light generators. We hold forth “the word of life,” Philippians 2:16. We perform this function in the word preached and practiced. The light and the life go together. For “in Him was life, and that life was the light of men,” John 1:4.

- **The significance expressed.** We must have the life of Christ before we can reflect the light of Christ, Ephesians 5:8-14. In other words, we cannot be a lighthouse if we are not plugged into the electricity. And, in spite of having electricity, if the reflectors are warped or dirty, the light will be dull, I John 1:5-7. Truth must be held forth by noble lamps. Jesus said,

  “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life,” John 8:12.

Every generation has its darkness. Faith is scorned. Distortion is rampant. Sin is on the loose. In a perverted, twisted, warped society, the light in us may be the only beacon of hope the world has. Otherwise darkness will prevail, Isaiah 60:1-3.

Is Sunday an ordinary day? Is the Bible a common book? Is Christ simply a man? Is Christianity merely a matter of opinion? We answer these questions by the way we live (or, better, by the way He lives through us)! Are we reliable lights, a true reflection of Jesus? The world is watching, Proverbs 4:18,19.

*Father, as a lighthouse, may I faithfully serve at my post. Keep me here as long as You need me. In Him, who is Light and Life, Amen.*
February 23

“Dominion and awe belong to God,” Job 25:2.

The Lord reigns throughout the universe. All powers—good and evil—submit to His authority, II Chronicles 20:6. He is the Commander of angelic armies. His presence is felt by everyone, Job 25:3. The Creator is far greater than the creature, Job 25:4.

“If God places no trust in His holy ones, ...how much less (in) man,” Job 15:15-16.

Jehovah is the God of gods, the Kings of kings, Psalms 95:3. There is no other god like Him. “Great is our Lord and mighty in power, His understanding has no limit,” Psalms 147:5. Rebellion against Him is futile, Isaiah 14:13-15; Revelation 12:7-9. He rules over all things, Ephesians 1:18-23. His sovereignty is essential, absolute, and permanent, I Chronicles 29:11. This truth sheds light on the twists and turns of history.

“Awe” is the proper attitude toward such a God, Deuteronomy 5:29; 10:12; Psalms 2:11. He should be feared by all the inhabitants of the earth, Psalms 33:8, especially by the redeemed, Psalms 89:15-17. For the earth with all of its wonder and heaven with all of its grandeur is only the outer fringe of His power, a mere whisper of His majesty.

The acknowledgement of His greatness stands in sharp contrast to the insignificance of humankind. Since the angels are guilty in the sight of God, Job 4:18, how can man secure acquittal before the judgment bar of heaven, Job 9:2b? Certainly our deeds alone will not suffice, Isaiah 57:12; Romans 3:20; Titus 3:4,5. We need to accept His grace in humble faith and grateful service, Romans 3:22-24; Ephesians 2:8-10. In the presence of His sovereignty, both angels and humans are unclean.

- **The ugly truth.** When likened to a moth, Job 4:19, a shadow, Job 14:2, or a maggot, Job 25:6, we are obviously insignificant, unworthy creatures, Psalms 22:6. But is it appropriate to highlight human limitation, emphasize human impurity? Should man be whittled down to unimportance and pronounced unacceptable? Does not such a condescending evaluation lead to a dangerous error?

- **A beautiful fact.** We must face reality. The power of God diminishes our size. But the love of God increases our worth. Recognition of both facts, acceptance of both truths can transform not only our perception of ourselves but also our understanding of God, Psalms 8:3-5. This is the bedrock of Christian faith, the basis of a saving relationship with the Lord, I Peter 5:6; cf. Hebrews 12:28; Revelation 15:4.

Your sovereignty is from everlasting to everlasting, O God. Your kingdom is forever. You are without peer. No one can fathom Your power. I approach You not because of who I am, but through Your Son, Jesus, my Lord and my God, Amen.
February 24

“We do not follow cleverly invented stories...we were eyewitnesses of His majesty,” II Peter 1:16.

The second letter of Peter was written to call believers back to the certainty of truth, II Peter 1:13. Confidence in belief leads to vigor of obedience. Because doubt is common, it is imperative that Christians know the foundation of their faith.

Athenagoras, a famous second century philosopher, doubted the truth of Christianity. He was determined to expose the folly of faith in Christ. However, after gathering the information that was used to support belief, Athenagoras changed his mind. The evidence was overwhelming. His intended tirade against Christianity became a classic defense of the Christian religion. As Luke wrote, in the introduction to his Gospel,

“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled...just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses,” Luke 1:1,2.

Christianity is true. It is not based on human imagination. It is not the product of wistful invention, Hebrews 2:3. It is not the fanciful embellishment of spurious tales, II Peter 2:3a. Our faith rests on solid eyewitness testimony, I John 1:1,2.

• **Not fiction.** The word “story” refers to silly human yarns, “godless myths” that promote “controversies,” I Timothy 1:3,4; 4:7. These stories were “Jewish myths” which confused the mind, Titus 1:13,14. They were fables framed as allegory that created delusion and argument. The Christian faith is not a result of such fiction. It does not stand on the “wisdom of men” but on the “power of God,” I Corinthians 2:4,5.

• **But fact.** Our faith rests on “the certainty of the things” we have been taught, Luke 1:4. The claims of Christianity will survive any court of law. Those who saw Him, heard Him, and touched Him gave their lives to tell about Him. Their testimony is accurate. They saw His glory, John 1:14. They proclaimed what they experienced, I John 1:3. Therefore, we know. We know Him. We know His teaching. And it is because of this knowledge that we are certain of what we do not see, Hebrews 11:1.

The apostles were “eyewitnesses,” Luke 24:46-48. The Gospel is fact not fiction. It rests on realities not rumors. We “do well to pay attention to it,” II Peter 1:19. The Jesus story is not a hallucination. The apostles were all there—fully conscious, completely awake—when they saw His “majesty,” II Peter 1:17,18. Their testimony is genuine. The Christian religion is not a human concoction.

Thank You, Lord, for the certainty of truth. I will grope along but there is enough light to get me home. In Him, who made Himself known, Amen.
February 25

“Arise, shine, for your light has come,” Isaiah 60:1.

For the most part, the last chapters of Isaiah are a series of prophecies about the destruction and restoration of Jerusalem, cf. Isaiah 40:9; 49:14-18; 51:17-23; 57:6-13. Though Israel was forsaken, there was still hope for the deserted city, Isaiah 61:4; 62:4.

As new hope grows,
As the rising sun glows,
See the light!

• **The light is coming.** The night was over. A new day was dawning. Like the “brightness” of morning overtaking the “darkness” of night, the renewal of Jerusalem would “appear,” Isaiah 60:2,3. The city heard a voice. “Arise!” Her devastation was past. The light had “come,” Isaiah 60:19,20. Israel was to “shine” for others, to attract the nations to Jehovah. She received light so she could give light, Isaiah 49:6.

In the hovels of men,
In the haunts of sin,
Shine the light!

• **The light is here.** God asked His followers to be “radiant,” to “throb and swell with joy,” Isaiah 60:5a. It is not the stained glass in our building but the poetry of our soul that penetrates the darkness. We are a light—a reflection of Him—when He dwells in the cathedral of our hearts, Psalms 89:5; Isaiah 2:5.

Shout the salvation story,
Share the news of glory,
Spread the light!

• **The light is sent.** We “reflect the Lord’s glory,” II Corinthians 3:18. He left us an example that we should follow in His footsteps, I Peter 2:12. It is the task of the Church to be what she is: the missionary people of God, Matthew 5:14-16.

Every sinner needs to hear,
What the saint makes clear,
Be the light!

If we are light, we must shine, Acts 13:47; Ephesians 5:8. The union between profession and practice validates our faith, proclaims the Good News, James 2:14-17. Since light travels faster than sound, the world will see our behavior before it hears our voice.

*Heavenly Father, please fuel my lamp that I may shine. The darkness will be illuminated by Your presence in me. Through the radiance of Your glory, Amen.*
Disaster looms when people are content to ignore the God of heaven, Hosea 4:5,6a; I Corinthians 14:36-38. There are many excuses offered in support of complacency. Without exception, the rationale is the same—preoccupation with personal interests.

Such was the case in the days of Haggai. The prophet faced a community of believers who put themselves ahead of the Lord. From a practical standpoint, that seemed, under the circumstances, like a sensible policy. The returned exiles had found their country in shambles. It was reasonable to set about rebuilding their homes and their businesses.

Yet practicality was not the best plan. Their priorities were skewed. Their logic was wrongheaded. The error was not in the practicality but the self-centeredness. When God is left out, the results are empty, Hebrews 2:2,3a. Hence, five times, in his no nonsense style, Haggai addressed the situation head on.

“Give careful thought to your ways,” Haggai 1:5,7,2:15,18.

The people were asked to measure their conduct in light of its outcome, Haggai 1:6-11. Things were not going well. Their efforts were fruitless. Their rational approach was no longer rational. The people should reconsider their ways, Proverbs 13:18; 15:32. Introspection is uniquely human. It sets us above the rest of creation, Lamentations 3:40. To neglect such a gift is to live beneath the dignity of our station. We should give careful thought to our ways for several reasons.

- **It is a command**, Psalms 4:4. We are to commune with our heart, examine our spiritual condition before we commune with the Lord, I Corinthians 11:28.

- **It is a practical necessity**, Proverbs 19:2. No one can make it home without pondering the path they pursue. Otherwise, they will become lost, Job 13:9.

- **It is an eternal issue**, II Corinthians 5:10. There is little reason to consider our ways if the consequences of our actions do not matter. But, if they have eternal implications, they require timely attention, Proverbs 5:21. Heaven begins on earth.

The benefit of self-evaluation validates its recommendation. We will not grow spiritually without an intimate acquaintance with our inner consciousness, Galatians 6:4a. The ability to “distinguish good from evil” is developed by training oneself through constant effort, Hebrews 5:14. That, then, is the reason why we should “give careful thought” to our ways, II Corinthians 13:5.

Omniscient Lord, I can deceive myself but I cannot fool You. Help me test my heart continually before the final exam. Because You, who knows all things, will be the Judge, Amen.
Believers must often deal with annoying Church members. The congregation in Thessalonica was no exception. Some misguided saints had quit their jobs. They had abandoned the routine claims of daily labor in order to wait in excited idleness for Christ to return, II Thessalonians 3:6.


Never grow weary in doing your bit,
Even when others decide to quit.
Labor for Jesus till shadows grow dim,
Never grow weary in working for Him.

- **Purpose of work.** Why toil when the Lord is coming? What is the advantage of being employed in the last days? The apostle responded by saying, “Never tire of doing what is right,” II Thessalonians 3:13, of working for a living. Believers should follow the example of Paul, I Corinthians 4:12a; II Thessalonians 3:7-9.

Never lose heart in spite of the toil,
Accept any task with a mind to be loyal.
Be willing to sacrifice life and limb,
Never lose heart in working for Him.


Duty lies in daily responsibilities. Common tasks are the training ground for heaven. By the appointment of God, most of us toil throughout life in mundane, commonplace assignments. Such so called busy work is a “gift” from above, Ecclesiastes 5:19. Work is a preparation for the coming of the Lord. It is the classroom of self-discipline. To do well, to please Him in all things has promise of great reward, Ephesians 6:7-8. We are expected to persevere every day in a quiet life of work, Colossians 3:23; I Thessalonians 5:12a. Happy minds are the product of busy hands.

*My chores are not a grind but a gift, Father. They are an essential part of life. I will rejoice in my work. In Him, who finished what He came to do, Amen.*
February 28


Is it possible to be perfect? Some people think so. They quote Jesus’ statement: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” Matthew 5:48. Care must be exercised, however, lest a contemporary meaning is attributed to a first century word. What did the term “perfect” imply? cf. Colossians 1:28; Hebrews 12:22,23.

The word “perfect” suggested “restoration.” It meant “to fix what was defective.” The term is translated “mature,” Colossians 4:12. Hence, the idea was to be what we ought to be, to put oneself in order, Philippians 3:12. The apostle was encouraging the Corinthians to get rid of the old ways, to become complete in Christ, cf. James 1:4.

No wonder the apostle prayed for their “perfection,” II Corinthians 13:9. Amends were in order. Improvement was possible. This Church could be confident that they would be supplied with what they were lacking, I Thessalonians 3:10. For “the God of love and peace” would be with them, II Corinthians 13:11.

Finish Your work in me,
Fully grown help me be.
May I trust Your helping hand,
To be ready for the promised land.

• Failure to grow. Many people fail to reach their full potential. They leave the Lord out. They try to grow on their own. Their efforts end in disappointment. Years of self-improvement achieve little. A revised me is still me. Until we include Him, true Christian maturity will remain beyond our grasp, Romans 8:9-11.

• Incentive to grow. There can be no standing still in our spiritual walk. If we are not moving ahead, we will fall behind. The word “perfection” is a present tense imperative term which means “keep improving.” It urges progress toward holiness. We will receive what He offers to the degree we allow Him to work in us, Philippians 2:13.


Holy God, You are the essence of perfection.
I want to be like You. Dwell in me. Show me
how to become mature so that I may attain the
stature and fullness of Christ. Though Him, who
was perfect while living in the flesh. Amen.
February 29

“Whatever you have commanded us we will do,” Joshua 1:16.

Moses was dead. Joshua was the leader of Israel, Joshua 1:1,2. One of his first tasks was to prepare for the conquest of Canaan, Joshua 1:10,11. Joshua appealed to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh to keep their vow to help in the conquest, Joshua 1:12-15.

The Trans Jordan tribes submitted to their new leader. Their commitment was impressive since they had the least to gain from their loyalty. They already had their inheritance, Numbers 32:33. Nonetheless, they pledged their allegiance to Joshua in the same way they had given their allegiance to Moses, Joshua 1:17a. There was no sign of reluctance in keeping the promise. Obedience was prompt. No excuse was offered for delay. Submission was complete.

“Whatever you have commanded us we will do,” Joshua 1:16.

The two and a half tribes could have looked for a loophole. They did not. They kept their word. Fidelity to vows is a noble quality, Psalms 15:1,4b. Infidelity to an oath is a grievous sin, Deuteronomy 23:21. These valiant men were a bold demonstration of faithfulness, a grand display of brotherhood, a wonderful example of devotion.

• **Example of Israel.** The people of God followed their leader but expected their leader to follow God, Joshua 1:17b. The Trans Jordan tribes promised to obey Joshua if he gave evidence that he obeyed Jehovah. His calling by God as well as his walking in the counsel of God motivated the people to follow the Lord, cf. Hebrews 13:7.

• **Spirit of the Church.** No segment of the family of God should live in isolation. We belong to one another. When a part of the Church pulls away from the larger community of faith, it violates the design of heaven for the Body of Christ, I Corinthians 12:24b-26. The whole is impoverished because a part has rejected the rest. Such mutiny defies the very nature of the Church, I Corinthians 12:12,13.

The Church is a unit with many parts, I Corinthians 12:18-20. Is not one part obligated to the other parts for the collective benefit of the whole? The Israelites in the Trans Jordan did not enjoy the comfort of their homes till they had helped their brothers and sisters secure the land, Numbers 32:20-22.

We receive in order to give, Matthew 10:8b. Every blessing is a trust to share. The ancient pattern of generosity is a blueprint for modern behavior. We must not forget Him who left heaven so that we can go to heaven, II Corinthians 5:15.

*Jehovah God, I pledge my allegiance to You. I promise my obedience will be prompt and complete as a measure of my devotion. Through Him, who commanded me to act that way, Amen.*
"You ask with wrong motives," James 4:3.

The choice is clear. We either submit to the will of God or surrender to the desires of the flesh. Unless believers consider themselves dead to sin, evil will reign in their mortal bodies. It will drive them to obey its conniving ways, Romans 6:12. The only escape is for saints to offer themselves as a living sacrifice, Romans 6:13.

The flesh is the place in which sin maintains a powerful presence, Romans 7:23. These inclinations create havoc among the members of the body (as well as war among the members of society). When passions are allowed to have their way, people get hurt. Individuals seek their own desires that end in quarrels and fights, James 4:2.

Those who engage in such harmful behavior are in effect murderers, I John 3:15; cf. Matthew 5:21,22. People are destroyed because passions take charge. Their feelings remain unsatisfied. The warring continues. In the midst of the struggle, the combatants may pray but receive nothing. God does not acknowledge their prayers. They ask with selfish motives, James 4:3. Lust camps in their heart. They go after, seize, and take as prey that which has been targeted for pleasure, I Peter 2:11. How nauseating!

• The problem. Why do people lack what they want? The reason is obvious. They attempt to supply their wishes at the expense of their fellow human beings. They employ force to secure what they desire. And, if they pray, they do not receive because they ask with “wrong motives,” cf. Psalms 66:18; Proverbs 1:28-33. Praying to satisfy personal wishes is not a prayer that has promise of reply.

  “God does not listen to sinners.” John 9:31a; cf. Deuteronomy 1:45; Job 35:13; Isaiah 1:15-17; Jeremiah 14:10-12; Micah 3:4.

• The solution. The rule for all prayer is to “to seek first the kingdom of God,” Matthew 6:33. Then all physical necessities will be supplied as needed. Prayer offered with the spirit of greed is like a thief praying for a profitable heist, a drunk begging for more booze, a pirate pleading for a gold laden victim, or a prostitute looking for a rich client. How selfish! God does not honor greed. Only prayers that are “according to His will” receive an answer, I John 5:14,15.

Is it ever right to ask for prosperity? Yes! Jabez did, I Chronicles 4:10. John did, too, III John 2. It is right if the answered prayer is not used on self-indulgence. For the purpose of prosperity is to serve God and others, Matthew 10:8b; Acts 20:35.

Gracious Lord. You promised to respond to selfless prayers. Cleanse my motives. Create in me a sharing heart. Bless me so that I can bless others. Thank You, in Jesus name, Amen.
“Where is their God?” Joel 2:17.

The prophet sounded an alarm. An army—like a swarm of locust—was poised to descend upon Jerusalem, Joel 2:1-11. The inhabitants of the holy city were instructed to repent, Joel 2:12-14; cf. II Chronicles 6:28-31. No one was exempt, Joel 2:15,16.

The call to repent was not a meeting for debate, discussion, fellowship, or entertainment. It was a gathering for soul searching, for humble confession. Anything less—in view of the threatening situation—would be a mockery. Genuine repentance was asking the Lord to spare His servants. It was a petition begging for mercy so that the saints would not become a reproach among the pagans, Joel 2:17; cf. Psalms 42:3.

The prayer of repentance included the missionary purpose of Israel. She was a chosen nation, chosen to draw unbelievers to the Lord. If, in the pending judgment, Jerusalem was destroyed, the pagans would ask: “Where is their God?” The heathens would assume He was a figment of their imagination. Though false, their assumption would frustrate the divine plan for saving the world.

• The reality. Unbelievers would scoff. The Jews would be insulted, Job 17:6. They would become an object of scorn, a target of ridicule, Deuteronomy 28:37; Jeremiah 24:9. Even the temple would suffer indignity, I Kings 9:6-8. The question “Where is their God?” was a fiendish sneer toward both Israel and Jehovah.

“My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’” Psalms 42:10.

The taunts were ludicrous. God was in heaven, Psalms 115:2,3. Nevertheless, the reproach would eventually fall on Him. For, if Israel was crushed, the power of God was in doubt, Numbers 14:13-16.

• The result. The basis of the appeal—like the intercession of Moses—focused on Israel as the heritage of God, Deuteronomy 9:26-29. The people were the treasure of heaven—called out of the world—to be a light to the Gentiles. Though guilty of sin, they pled for pardon in order to fulfill their purpose. His mission was in jeopardy. The prayer of repentance centered not only on their fate but also the fate of the pagans who might doubt the existence of God, Psalms 79:10; Micah 7:10.

Prayers of repentance should be double edged. In repenting, men pray to be spared. In being spared, they pray for the purpose of heaven to be fulfilled through them. In times past, God drew the nations to Himself through Israel, I Kings 8:56-60. Now, through faithful witnesses, He draws seekers to the light—where they find God, John 1:6-9.

Forgive my offenses, Lord. Do not take vengeance. Spare me. May Your mercy be a testimony to Your kindness toward the world. Through my Redeemer, Amen.
March 3

“He does not take back His words,” Isaiah 31:2.

Superior strength belongs to those nations who have the most military hardware. Hence, Judah forged a treaty with Egypt, Isaiah 31:1. They did not trust God, Psalms 20:7.

The Egyptians were no help to Judah, Isaiah 31:3. Though famous for her horses and chariots, Exodus 14:9, when the hour of crisis came, the Egyptians proved impotent, Isaiah 19:15,16. Apparently Judah had thought trust in God was outdated, a relic of former naiveté, a shallow simplicity that kept them from shoring up their national security. What an incredibly stupid conclusion! Isaiah 30:1-5.

Judah should have turned to God. He alone could “deliver” her, Isaiah 31:4,5. He had already defeated the mightiest armies of the world, II Kings 6:18; 7:5-7; 19:35.

There is no one like Him to help the powerless against the powerful, II Chronicles 14:11.

• A frequent mistake. Judah committed a common error. She did not have confidence in God. She placed her trust in weaponry. Humans are prone to neglect the priority of spiritual realities. Visible guns are easier to rely on than an invisible God.

• A persistent practice. We elect politicians to run our country. We commit our future to their wisdom. We forget that God is wiser than man—than all men combined, I Corinthians 1:20. Should not the Lord be the point of reference? Should not national security be framed in terms of His will?

Judah was weary of hearing about God, Isaiah 30:8-11. Is that not the defect in contemporary political policy? The outcome was disastrous then. Will the results not be the same now? If we do not trust the throne above, will we have safety below? God has spoken. “He does not take back His words,” Isaiah 31:2.

The warning of the prophet about forgetting the omnipotence of God is as modern as if it was spoken yesterday. It is easy to think of God in connection with Church and disregard Him in government. We regularly treat the Lord as if He only occupies a minor ritual function in our lives. We ignore His power in time of military confrontation.

Man depends on armed forces. God depends on a baby in a manger. In the face of a menacing foe, faith in God seems foolish. An alliance with “Egypt” appears more realistic. But “the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength,” I Corinthians 1:25.

Almighty God, I live in perilous times. Yet I rely on You. I trust Your power. You are my refuge. In Him, who has all power in heaven and on earth, Amen.
March 4

“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul,” Hebrews 6:19.

God made a promise to Abraham. His pledge was sure because Jehovah cannot lie, Hebrews 6:18. To make the promise doubly binding, the Lord sealed it with an oath, Hebrews 6:13,14. God was His own guarantee, Hebrews 6:16,17. Today we are assured of salvation in Christ. It is sure because the Savior has gone on ahead to heaven, John 14:1-4. Jesus was a scout, a reconnaissance corps marking the trail for us to follow.

Jesus has already entered heaven to prepare a place for us so that where He is we may also be, Hebrews 6:19,20a.

The oath given to Abraham was not to bolster a flagging hope (as if his faith was faltering). Rather, the oath was uttered at a time when the patriarch showed himself unwavering in his belief, Genesis 22:15-18. Heretofore, the promise of God relied on the trust of Abraham. At Mount Moriah, the Lord transformed a promise into a prediction. In Jesus, our hope of redemption becomes the certainty of salvation, I Peter 1:3-5.

The blessing of this hope is in our feeling its grip. When a ship is riding out a storm, the sailors feel the pull of the anchor. The more the wind rages, the more they feel the tug. Jesus is our anchor. He gently draws us toward our eternal home, Colossians 3:1. The analogy of the anchor is rich in pertinent thoughts.

• **An anchor implies a storm.** In spite of disease or death, we have reason to be confident. Our hope is “firm and secure,” Hebrews 6:19a. It is connected by the chain of faith to the oath of God, Proverbs 3:26.

• **An anchor holds a ship.** Our hope of salvation keeps us focused on doing His will, Hebrews 6:9-12. His solemn pledge is infallibly certified as true. We need not be distraught, II Corinthians 1:21,22. Heaven is just ahead.

• **An anchor maintains a position.** When an anchor is let down, the larger the waves the deeper it digs into the ocean floor. It steadies the boat, keeps it from drifting. In the same way, our hope cements us more firmly to the Rock of Ages, Psalms 46:1-3.

The saints put their hope “in God,” I Peter 1:21. They believe His promises. They stay on course—unmoved by the tempest. Their frail boat may be tossed about in the sea of life—battered by the rise and fall of menacing waves. The landmarks may be obscured. The lighthouse may be hidden. But they are not lost in an ocean of uncertainty. Believers have hope—are certain they already have “eternal life,” I John 5:13.

Thank You, kind Lord, for the guarantee of salvation in Christ. He is now where I hope soon to be. I feel His tug. I move ahead in confidence. Through Him, who is already in heaven, Amen.
False prophets are spiritual fakes disguised as pious clergymen. They prey on the unsuspecting, exploit the innocent. In the end, they turn people away from God, Micah 3:5a.

These religious charlatans claim to be ministers of the Lord, to have the best interests of the faithful at heart. Nevertheless, they are utterly mercenary—hirelings of the worst sort, Micah 3:11a. Their pretense mocks honesty. They are sophists of the rankest kind.

No trust is more sacred than the ministry of the word, more scandalized when delivered with a monetary motive, I Timothy 6:3-5. Micah was disgusted with the skullduggery of these spiritual frauds. They took their cues from earth rather than heaven, got their directions from below rather than above, Micah 3:5b,c; Isaiah 9:14-16.

“If a liar and deceiver comes and says ‘I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,’ he would be just the prophet for this people!” Micah 2:11; cf. II Timothy 4:1,2.

- **The condemnation of pretense.** The gift of prophecy was taken from them, Micah 3:6. Shame and disgrace was their lot, Micah 3:7. The Lord does not tolerate hypocrisy in the pulpit. The vocation of prophecy was not in question. The abuse of the office was—the prostitution of spiritual service to personal profiteering.

- **The commendation of honesty.** By contrast, Micah said his message was saturated with divine power, Micah 3:8. Far from arrogant boasting, Micah was affirming the integrity of his ministry. Likewise, ministers today should fulfill their calling in the strength that comes from above, I Timothy 1:12. They have the Spirit of God, I Corinthians 2:12. They serve as the mouthpiece of heaven, Ephesians 6:19,20.

The ancient people relied on the prophets to deliver the message of God. They did not have a complete Bible. However, some of these messengers turned a legitimate vocation into a money making scheme. The clergy is forever vulnerable to such perversion, Jeremiah 23:30-32. They offer their services to customers for a price. The line between right and wrong, God and self is blurred. We dare not fall into such duplicity.

Gracious Lord, I do not want to be a counterfeit. My ministry must be above reproach. I have freely received. As Your servant, may I freely give. In Him, who is the Minister of ministers. Amen.
“(David was) bound securely in the bundle of the living,” I Samuel 25:29.

Nabal was a wealthy man. Abigail was his wife, I Samuel 25:2,3. David wanted food as compensation for protecting the flocks of Nabal, I Samuel 25:4-8. But Nabal was indignant. He snubbed David, refused to repay his kindness, I Samuel 25:10,11. Because of such ill treatment, David planned to take revenge, I Samuel 25:12,13.

The situation was on the verge of bloodshed. David was an honorable person, I Samuel 25:14-16. Nabal was a “wicked man,” I Samuel 25:17. Abigail interceded, I Samuel 25:23-27. As long as David fought the battles of God, she reasoned, he would be blessed, I Samuel 25:28. She urged him not to pursue his own personal vendetta. In other words, David should not dissipate his energy on senseless squabbles. As a man of God, he should focus on the purposes of his God.

- **A sobering insight.** Abigail saw the bigger picture. She reminded David that he was “bound securely in the bundle of the living,” I Samuel 25:29. Her figure of speech referred to a cherished memento, precious gift, or treasured keepsake. With uncanny insight, she anticipated the reality of our union with the Lord: “Your life is hid with Christ in God,” Colossians 3:3.

- **A significant suggestion.** The word “bundle” is elsewhere translated “pouch,” Genesis 42:35, “sachet,” Song of Songs 1:13, or “purse,” Haggai 1:6. It conveys the idea of someone carrying a valued object in a bag. During Old Testament times, important things were “wrapped in a bundle” to prevent their being injured or lost, Exodus 12:34. In like manner, God keeps those who are precious to Him.

  In His pouch,
  Bag or purse,
  I am kept as a treasure
  Safe and secure;
  Tucked in His sachet,
  Prized and protected for sure.

We are safe in the arms of God, Proverbs 29:25; Jeremiah 23:4; I John 5:18. We will not be “lost,” John 6:39, nor snatched out of His hands, John 10:29.

David was bumped off course by trifling provocations. We, too, let our guard down, take our eyes off the business of the Father. We get sidetracked by our skirmishes with men. We forget we are wrapped in the bundle of God, hidden safely in the pocket of the Lord. We need not waste our time over petty misunderstandings.

*Please, God, rescue me from silly fusses. May I live on a higher plane. Hide me in Your purse. Through Jesus, who keeps me as a cherished treasure, Amen.*
March 7

“I have loved you with an everlasting love, Jeremiah 31:3.

Israel was languishing in exile. Her homeland was devastated. The government was destroyed. Her temple lay in ruins. Where is “everlasting love” in all of that?

Appearances are not always reality. For, in fact, God was waiting for His people, anticipating their return. It was as if He had already “drawn” them home, Jeremiah 31:3, as if He had already “lifted” them out of their despair, Hosea 11:4. Indeed, there was hope. With His “everlasting love,” the Lord would restore Israel, Jeremiah 31:4,5.

• **God cares.** The exodus was clear evidence of His care, Deuteronomy 7:8. He loved Israel as a man reconciles with his wayward wife, Hosea 3:1. His people could only stand in awe. The Creator bent down and lifted them up, Deuteronomy 10:14,15. His compassion was beyond explanation. The occasions of His kindness were precious memories, Isaiah 63:7. So, again, He turned curses into blessings, Deuteronomy 23:5. Despite the exile, the Lord was luring Israel home.

• **Man is careless.** The affection of humans is not the love of God. His love is “everlasting.” Our affection is like a cut flower. It soon withers. Yet, though the Lord is jilted, He takes the faded flower and presses it in a book. He keeps it as a priceless treasure. He waits. He hopes. He fans the embers of former affection into a rekindled fire of faithfulness.

In view of our sinful nature, we are amazed at this truth. How can it be? The Lord is too pure to dilly dally with impurity, Habakkuk, 1:13a. Why should He love corrupt mortals like us? We spurn His grace, ignore His will, and reject His encouragement. What right do we have to expect His compassion? Still He loves us with an “everlasting love.”

“(His) love never fails,” I Corinthians 13:8a.

Seasons of pain are required in times of rebellion. We can stall (for a time) the kindness of God, delay the blessings He wishes to bestow. The Lord endures the waiting in hope that the prodigal will return, Nehemiah 9:30,31. He whispers encouraging words. The delay is not His reluctance but human stubbornness, Jeremiah 30:11.

God loves because He is love, I John 4:16b. He cannot be otherwise. It is His nature to be that way. Such love is not turned off by the unworthiness of its object—any more than closed shutters prevent the sun from shining. His love is everlasting because He is everlasting. He never forgets, Isaiah 49:15. His mercy is without limit, inexhaustible, and unending, Isaiah 30:18. Only the saints can fathom it, Ephesians 3:17b-19.

You, O Lord, are infinite love. Thank You for Your care. Draw me. Lift me. Allure me. Bring me gently home. In Him, whose love knows no boundaries, Amen.
March 8

“Fan into flame the gift of God,” II Timothy 1:6.

Timothy was called to the ministry. Yet, in spite of his calling, the young evangelist needed to be vigilant. He must not “neglect” his gift of service, I Timothy 4:14. Since he had received a “spirit of power,” II Timothy 1:7, he should speak boldly. There was no reason to be “ashamed to testify” about Jesus, II Timothy 1:8.

Apparently the embers of his gift were no longer red hot. There were likely several contributing factors. It seems Timothy was naturally timid, I Corinthians 16:10. He was young, I Timothy 4:12; II Timothy 2:22. He faced stiff opposition, I Timothy 1:3-7; 6:3-5; II Timothy 2:14-18. And he dealt with frequent physical illness, I Timothy 5:23. These combined to dampen his enthusiasm for Church work.

- **Stoker his fire.** Paul “reminds” his apprentice to rekindle the fire of his ministry, II Timothy 1:6. The flame of urgency was low. It must be stirred into a blaze again. Timothy must step up to the plate. The apostle was about to depart, II Timothy 4:6. He was passing his mantle of responsibility to his young charge. Timothy must take up where Paul left off. He had a sacred trust. The younger man must overcome his tendency to shrink back.

- **Renew his commitment.** A new challenge was on the horizon. Rome was about to issue a decree. Christianity would become an illegal religion. Intense persecution was ahead. Paul would be executed. Instead of being an assistant, Timothy must take the reins of leadership. He must stir up his passion for the kingdom, stand firm against the foes of truth. Paul counsels his son in the faith to:

  “Suffer for the Gospel,” II Timothy 1:8b.
  “Keep the pattern of sound teaching,” II Timothy 1:13.
  “Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you,” II Timothy 1:14.

The old mentor was anxious for the young intern to vigorously respond to his calling. He was urging Timothy to make every effort to unwrap the gift of his ministry.

Believers often experience discouragement over the progress of the Good News. Disappointment leaves the saints vulnerable. Sacrificial service is called into question. Therefore, the faith of the faithful needs constant rekindling, I Thessalonians 5:19. All fires die unless tended from time to time. It is not a matter of relighting a dead flame but reenergizing a sagging spirit. Devotion requires maintenance. The apostle gently reminds us of our responsibility to stir the flagging embers of Christian commitment.

*You, my God, are the fire of my ministry, the source of my faith. Your power is my strength to persevere. When the coals of my resolve burn low, prompt me to rekindle the holy flame. Through Him, who was faithful to the end, Amen.*
Terrible calamities were just ahead. A cruel enemy was approaching. Ruthless troops would soon overwhelm the land. The capitol city would be sacked. The people were scheduled for slaughter. These ominous calamities drove the prophet to beg for mercy. His tearful plea was a response to the solemn promise of heaven.

“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you,” Psalms 50:15.

Habakkuk caught a glimpse of God. He stood in awe. Respect was an appropriate response, Malachi 2:5,6. Reverence for the Almighty did not drive him from God. It drew him to the Lord, Isaiah 29:22,23. The prophet kept in balance the tender compassion and the awesome judgment of heaven.

“Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere Him,” Psalms 33:8.

Habakkuk managed to reconcile the goodness and the severity of God, Romans 11:22. He knew it was better to rely on the Lord than expect the enemy to help, II Samuel 24:14. The experience of trusting God in times of trouble inspired a respect for His holiness, justice, and power, Habakkuk 3:16.

Now it is our turn to stand in awe of His deeds, trust Him in our hour of need, and pray for His gracious mercy. The Lord will respond. All will be well, Psalms 23:4.

Awesome God, I bow before Your throne. As the nations tremble in Your presence, awed by the strokes of Your judgment, I, too, acknowledge Your power. Accept my undying devotion. In Jesus, my Lord, Amen.
Compliance is an inclination to accept the words of others. Though amiable, it can be dangerous, I John 4:1. For cheerfully obliging to follow any religious teacher can lead to a poverty of truth, a bankruptcy of the soul, II Peter 2:1-3.

Those who are “from God” are engaged in a struggle for truth. The battle is about allegiance. The issue is loyalty to His word. The faithful are “from God,” I John 4:4. Righteousness dwells in them, I John 2:14. The decisive victory is made possible by the Holy Spirit abiding in their hearts, Romans 8:5,6.

False teachers are not “from God.” They do not listen to Him or proclaim His message. They turn from the inspired word, ignore the Lord, and champion evil. They do not hear Jesus because they do not “belong to God,” John 8:47.

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ,” Colossians 2:8.

- **Teachers of error.** False teachers follow the prince of deception. Their speech is earthly, John 3:31; I John 4:5. The world embraces them, buys their point of view. But Christians listen to God. The distinction between saints and sinners is contingent on who has their ear, Revelation 3:6.

- **Followers of evil.** The world opposes God (and the godly). It shuts its ears to the truth, I John 4:6. The reason is obvious. How can the arrogant understand humility? How can the selfish grasp generosity? How can those in sin appreciate righteousness? A person can hear only what his ear is tuned to hear—like those who have locked their radio dial on one station, I Corinthians 2:14.

- **Father of lies.** Satan is strong but not invincible. He has been overcome, John 12:31; 16:33. He was no match against the Lord. Jesus defeated him in the desert, Matthew 4:11, dethroned him by the cross, Colossians 2:15. Believers have nothing to fear. The great deceiver is declawed, dehorned, and detained forever, Revelation 20:10.

Wickedness can resemble the truth. But, like a lead coin covered with gold, it is still counterfeit. It makes a dull thud when dropped on a hard surface. False teachers do not make a true sound (though they quote from the Bible, Matthew 4:5,6). Hence, those “from God” are vigilant, Proverbs 4:23; Mark 13:32-37; I Corinthians 16:13.

*Father of holiness, Lord of truth, I treasure Your word. It is a light to my path, a guide to my footsteps. I stand firm on scripture, loyal to the message, unmoved by religious fakes. Through Him, who is the Truth, Amen.*
March 11

“My heart is stirred by a noble theme,” Psalms 45:1.

The writer was overflowing with the happy thoughts of a royal wedding, Psalms 45:2-15. His heart was so full that the words poured out on the parchment in rapid succession. His musings surfaced like stampeding horses, Psalms 45:1.

The bubbling up of his ideas was excitement in motion. Out of the fullness of his heart, the “noble theme” rushed forth. It sprang from the subject on which his mind was riveted. His thoughts carried him forward in an explosion of poetry, cf. Jeremiah 20:9.

The heart of the composer was boiling over with insights that flashed like lightning. The poet struggled to record the verses as fast as he framed his thoughts. He needed nimble fingers to keep up with his racing mind.

Whatever the ancient author may have thought about the inspiration of his composition, he certainly had no doubt about his creative impulse. “Heart,” “tongue,” and “pen” were absorbed in the action. It was not the arduous work of a bored song writer. It was the imaginative reminiscence of a delighted composer. The psalmist could not resist the urge to put down the lyrics of the majestic hymn that danced in his head. So also was the obsession that drove the author of these devotional studies. The grandeur of his subject propelled him to write.

“Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore, God, Your God, has set You above Your companions by anointing You with the oil of joy, Psalms 45:6,7.

- **Reason for excitement.** In the early Church, this passage was regarded as a messianic song. The words were echoed in the life of Jesus, Hebrews 1:8,9. Hence, the writer had good reason to be excited. We should, too! Romans 13:11. “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men of God spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit,” II Peter 1:21.

- **Need for excitement.** Enthusiasm builds cathedrals, Ezra 1:5; Haggai 1:14. Excitement initiates good deeds, Hebrews 10:24. It is essential for believers to “delight in the Lord,” Psalms 37:4. The kingdom is advanced by keeping the fire burning on the altar of exuberance. Without fire, we cannot light a flame in others. We must nurture the glow of excitement lest we sink into the ashes of despair, II Peter 3:1,2. Faith must be a passion (not a pastime), Psalms 39:1-3.

Awesome God, I am overwhelmed. It is exciting to realize what You have done, are doing, and will do. My mind cannot contain the thought. Through Him, in whom I delight, Amen.
“On what are you basing this confidence of yours?” II Kings 18:19.

Within any context, that question has great significance. Where should confidence be placed? There are often several possibilities. Each is arguably attractive. Which is best?

The situation was grim. Enemy troops were descending on Jerusalem like flood waters sweeping over the country side, Isaiah 8:5-8. Fortified cities were crushed like dry straw. Judah was surrounded. She had nowhere to turn, no one to help in this desperate hour, Isaiah 36:1. Pinned down in Jerusalem, Hezekiah was forced to consider his options.

- **Human allies.** Judah had forged an alliance with Egypt. Surely they would help. But, unfortunately, when the chips were down, Egypt was merely a “splintered reed,” II Kings 18:20,21. Though Egyptian envoys had offices in Judah, they were “useless.” They brought “neither help nor advantage,” Isaiah 30:1-5. Throughout history, treachery, self-interest, and political change has caused long standing friendships among nations to melt like wax exposed to the sun.

- **Material resources.** Did Hezekiah have horses? And, if he did, could he find riders for them? No! II Kings 18:23,24. It is amazing the trust nations place in military power. They assume victory is assured when they possess armament for battle. So they stockpile weapons, train troops, and organize strategies in order to secure their future. They forget that “there is no one like (the Lord) to help the powerless against the mighty,” II Chronicles 14:11. They fail to remember that “the race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong,” Ecclesiastes 9:11. Material resources were not an option.

- **Divine assistance.** Relying on allies was futile. Opting for military resistance was hopeless. The only recourse was to trust Jehovah. Hezekiah did, II Kings 18:5. The enemy ridiculed such confidence, II Kings 18:25. Judah was in a tight spot. If God did not intervene, the situation was hopeless. Yet, against common sense, Hezekiah stood firm.

   It may be your way,
   It may be my way,
   But, beyond any doubt,
   It will be His way.

Faith is its own argument. When all seems lost, those who cling to the King of kings will experience the victory, Psalms 60:11,12. The Lord took action against the invaders. Without shooting an arrow, they were soundly defeated, II Kings 19:35,36. Hezekiah put his confidence in God. Where do we put ours? Hebrews 13:6.

   O, Helper of the helpless, I am weak. In the decisive hour, I want to be faithful. Help me prepare for that day. I trust in You, my refuge, Amen.
March 13

"Diotrephes...loves to be first." III John 9.

In the latter part of the first century, a new form of Church organization was taking shape. The apostles were passing from the scene. Another generation of leaders was stepping into the gap. Diotrephes was an unhappy expression of this new development.

Nothing is known of Diotrephes except his desire to put himself first. Because he remained obscure indicates he may have failed to reach his goal. Apparently he was a vain, pompous, self-asserting Church member who intended to get his way. He respected no authority but his own. If others opposed him, he expelled them. Such self interest could only result in failure, Matthew 23:12.

Personal ambition led Diotrephes to create havoc in the Church, III John 10. Like hunger, ambition obeys no law but its appetite. It is merciless in the quest to satisfy itself. Diotrephes stepped on others to advance his own cause. He failed to act as a Christian, John 13:34. In wanting to be “first,” he ended up being last, Matthew 19:30.

The term “first” suggests priority, Matthew 7:5; Luke 14:28,31. Hence, we are to reconcile with others before worshipping God, Matthew 5:23,24. We are to “first” seek the kingdom, Matthew 6:33. But we must not put ourselves first. For he who desires “the most important seats” or “the places of honor” will be “punished severely,” Mark 12:38-40.

• **Ambition of the arrogant.** In order to be first, Diotrephes bullied others. He did not listen. He did not care to know their thoughts (much less follow their suggestions). He was arrogant, self-centered, and condescending. In every way, his conduct was unbecoming to his Christian claim, Matthew 7:15.

• **Mistake of the proud.** In spite of all his leadership skills, Diotrephes was flawed. He did not consider others better than himself, Philippians 2:3. Diotrephes may have had some good ideas but he expressed them in hurtful ways. His ambition was the handmaid of mischief. His good intentions did not compensate for his bad behavior.


Diotrephes loved to be the leader. He aspired to be the boss. Christians must not imitate his behavior, III John 11. Instead, they should copy those who follow Christ, I Corinthians 11:1. Only when others are put “first” is there evidence that one is qualified to lead the people of God.

*Father, You have a habit of serving others. I want to be like You. My priorities need rearranging. In Him, who put me first, Amen.*
March 14


Humans are inclined toward evil, Genesis 6:5; 8:21a. Their minds entertain corrupting thoughts, corrosive imaginations, and crippling delusions. When humans rely on their own impulses, they are robbed of insights from heaven, Jeremiah 9:23,24. It is presumptuous to put our confidence in self. Only a fool is so stupid.

Humans should rely on the Lord, Proverbs 3:5,6. People usually think too highly of their moral strength, Matthew 26:35. They are needlessly drawn into temptation. Over estimating ourselves leads to grievous error, Matthew 26:56b. A high opinion of oneself is the formula for defeat. If we had more faith in God, we would put less trust in ourselves. A major ploy of the devil is self-reliance. It is a proven shortcut to ultimate disaster.

“If you think you are standing, be careful that you do not fall!” I Corinthians 10:12.

The heart is deceitful, Jeremiah 17:9. Therein abides hidden weaknesses and unsuspected limitations. Ignorance of self makes reliance on self silly. Why? Self-trust is like leaning on a broken stick. Hence, there is much wisdom in the saying: “Know yourself.”

• **The wise.** It is not enough to see the danger in trusting self. Everyone must lean on someone or something. Christians lean on God. He is our refuge. Those who trust Him need not be discouraged, Deuteronomy 31:8.

• **The fool.** A simpleton thinks he knows. Yet he exhibits a propensity to make bad choices. He hates knowledge, has no desire for wisdom, and does not take delight in understanding, Proverbs 1:22; 17:16; 18:2. Watch out! Avoid the fool, Proverbs 14:7. His folly leads to darkness, Proverbs 4:18,19.

When all the characteristics of a fool are examined, two things stand out. (1) A fool is unwilling to learn (whether through advice, discipline, or experience), Proverbs 12:15; 17:10; 26:11; 27:22. And (2) a fool lacks self control (whether in how he reacts, what he does, or what he says), Proverbs 12:16; 14:16; 15:2. Obviously, then, companionship with a fool can result in great harm, Proverbs 13:20. Beware! We may be that fool!

No one fully understands the past. We are flawed and biased. No one fully comprehends the present. We are weak and vulnerable. No one fully knows the future. We are blind and ignorant. Severe trials, strong temptations, and heavy responsibilities dog our steps. It is wise, therefore, to trust in God. He has promised to sustain us, Psalms 32:10; 125:1; Isaiah 26:3; 40:30,31; II Timothy 1:12. The Lord will help us stand, Romans 14:4.

Wise and gracious God, I am often foolish. I know better but do not do better. I promise to lean on You completely. In Him who is my refuge, Amen.
March 15


Should that statement be taken literally? Giving is good (though our pockets have limitations). To assume it tells us what to do in every situation violates the intention of Jesus. He was announcing a general principle, Matthew 5:38-42. In effect the Lord was saying, “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” Acts 20:35.

As a river flows toward the sea,
It gives its treasures rich and free.

Three scenarios are described by Jesus which saints may be called upon to endure. Each scenario reflected an increase in aggression—hate, cursing, and spiteful abuse. The response to such opposition was a corresponding intensification of love—doing good, blessing, and praying for the unkind abuser, Luke 6:27,28; I Peter 4:12,13.

- **Policy of God.** On such occasions, the abused, using the standards of the world, will demand their rights. But, by contrast, the disciple of Christ does what is right. His patient endurance overcomes evil with good, Romans 12:17-21. His gestures of kindness stifle further aggression. He smothers hate with love, Luke 6:29,30.

- **Standard of men.** In the world, the cardinal principle is: “What does one get in return?” Proverbs 21:25,26. To act without hope of reward is beyond human understanding. People tend to give as much as they expect to get. The Lord rejected that motivation. The children of God love solely for the sake of being kind, Luke 6:37,38.

From Christ we should learn
Kindness that expects no return.

Jesus suggested a strategy for dealing with difficult people. We must not hate our enemies. Rather we should love them as we love ourselves, Luke 6:31. This is the path to victorious living. We view our antagonists as worthy of the best in life (in spite of their flaws), Philippians 2:3,4.

That is not easy. How can we overcome our impulse to resent insult, avoid injury, and lash out against abuse? How do we conquer our slowness to love the unlovable? How do we translate this high ideal into deliberate action toward difficult people? Proverbs 20:22; 24:29. We cannot! We cannot without transformation, Romans 12:2, without strength from above, Ephesians 3:14-16. The Lord was calling for renewal—a radical change from the inside out, Ephesians 4:22-24. It is time to be transformed!

Lord, You have set the bar high. You are
wanting me to be a better person. Stretch me!
Renew me! I cannot wait to see the finished
product. In the hands of my Maker, Amen.
March 16

“Who is willing to consecrate himself today to the Lord?” I Chronicles 29:5.

The construction of the temple was a monument to the willingness of humans to donate, I Chronicles 29:6-8. Their example of giving stood above the monetary value of their gifts. They gave “freely and wholehearted to the Lord,” I Chronicles 29:9.

Jesus spoke of self-giving as the measure of discipleship, Matthew 16:24,25. The Gospel requires a personal sacrifice. The extent to which we give of ourselves is the gauge of our consecration.

The word “consecrate” means to separate. The priests were to keep away from the sacred offerings until they were ceremonially clean, Leviticus 22:3. A Nazirite was to “abstain” from “anything that comes from the grapevine,” Numbers 6:2-4. The act of consecration dedicated a person (or thing) to a sacred purpose, Joshua 6:19; II Chronicles 31:6. Therefore, those who dedicated themselves to the Lord willingly brought gifts, II Chronicles 29:31.

• Ancient example. David gave liberally from his own “resources,” his “personal treasures,” I Chronicles 29:2,3. He set the pace. He showed the way. He inspired others. David gave. He asked his countrymen to give, I Chronicles 29:5b. His appeal was heard because it was seen, I Chronicles 29:9. The people abstained from keeping their possessions to themselves. They gave abundantly knowing their offerings did not really belong to them, I Chronicles 29:14-16; Psalms 24:1.

• Present responsibility. We give from the inventory of what we have received, I Chronicles 29:11,12. “Every good and perfect gift is from above,” James 1:17. All we have belongs to our Father, Luke 15:31. We are not impoverished by giving something to Him who has already given everything to us. We have received blessing after blessing from the fullness of His grace, John 1:16. To give willingly is the minimum we can offer.

“Freely you have received, freely give,” Matthew 10:8b.

The Lord tests our heart. He plumbs the depth of our devotion, measures the integrity of our faith, I Chronicles 29:17. God weights the inner intentions rather than the outer appearance, I Samuel 16:7. Our professed consecration is examined by the piercing scrutiny of an all-seeing God, Hebrews 4:12,13. Do we practice what we proclaim? Is our consecration reflected in our giving? Do we willingly return to Him who so freely gave everything to us?

Father, You know me far better than I know myself.
I want to have a genuine faith, a liberal pocketbook.
Hear my plea. Consecrate my heart. Answer my prayer.
In full dependence on Him who gave me all I own, Amen.

Many incredible things happen in life—marvelous things beyond human ability to understand, Jeremiah 32:17; Zechariah 8:6. We are often befuddled by the behavior of man, Deuteronomy 17:8, and the creation of God, Job 38:16-21.  

In her ninetieth year, Sarah was promised a child. The likelihood of this happy event seemed impossible. She laughed at the prospect of being a mother in her old age, Genesis 18:13. Abraham also laughed at the preposterous promise, Genesis 17:17.  

This aged couple was called on the carpet for laughing at the promise of the God. “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” Genesis 18:14; cf. Job 42:2; Jeremiah 32:27. It was an act of mercy to expose their lack of faith. For, through the patient working of God, they were ushered into the arena of trust, Romans 4:18-21. And, later, they were enshrined on the list of the faithful, Hebrews 11:11. Their trust against all odds was instrumental in accomplishing the purposes of God.  

The idea of becoming parents at their age was contrary to reason. It was against common sense. We tend to measure the power of God by the capacity of man. Hence, miracles are always absurd when the Lord is left out of the equation. The distance between a divine promise and human ability spawns disbelief. Doubt is inevitable.  

- **Initial doubt.** Sarah laughed in disbelief, Genesis 18:12. Faith in the existence of God is one thing. Believing He works in our life is something else. Why should she succumb to such an outlandish promise? With humans, it was impossible for Sarah to have children. “But, with God, all things are possible,” Matthew 19:26.  

- **Hesitant trust.** The promise was fulfilled in spite of her distrusting grin. Those who desire to believe in God are often hesitant to take the plunge of faith. They are overwhelmed by the insanity of the challenge. They are embarrassed by the scornful smirk of unbelievers. They are defeated by the tyranny of the ridiculous. But Sarah held on to that which was too good to be true. She had the last laugh, Genesis 21:6,7.  

“*You of little faith...why did you doubt,*” Matthew 14:31.  

Miracles prove that nothing is demanded of faith which is not justified by the history of divine intervention on earth. The demand involves ignoring the enormity of the promise. It is earnestly seeking Him who rewards those who trust Him, Hebrews 11:6. Obviously a sober assessment of our trust in the Lord is needed, James 4:7-10.  

*O Lord, there is no limit to Your power. Nothing is impossible for You. I reach up to grasp that truth. Help me hold on to it. In Jesus, the author of the impossible, Amen.*
Ruth chose to go to a barley field owned by a relative. At the time, she was unaware of the family connection. Her choice appeared to be purely happenstance, Ruth 2:3. However, truth be known, all human activity is on the radar screen of God. Thus, it is good to pray for incidental events in life, Genesis 24:12-14. It may seem we are victims of chance, Ecclesiastes 9:11, but the Lord is in control, Proverbs 16:33. We are prone to think many things “just happen” but His hidden presence is behind them all.

- **Chance.** The scriptures often allude to chance, Deuteronomy 22:6; I Samuel 6:8,9; II Samuel 1:6. Yet the hand of God is present. This was obvious in the story of Ruth. For, behind the scenes, God was at work in her life.

  Providence!
  What a bracing word.
  Through all the pain and tears,
  Through all the paralyzing fears,
  God is there throughout the years.

Some are prone to wonder if things are merely the result of luck. Believers think otherwise. Though the young woman happened to go to a field of a relative, Naomi, her mother-in-law, saw it as the blessing from God, Ruth 2:20.

- **Providence.** When things go well, people say good fortune has smiled on them. When things go bad, they believe fate has thrown them a curve. Is that all that is involved? What about the providence of God? Was not the Lord working in the choice of Ruth? Yes! Providence is not a wistful dream. Nor is reality ruled by chance. Rather, everyone and everything resides in the hands of God—even though “no man knows whether love or hate awaits him,” Ecclesiastes 9:1.

  Providence!
  What a comforting word.
  In all the worry and dread,
  In all the wishes that fled,
  God was there just like He said.

It seemed of little importance what field Ruth chose, yet it became the foundation of her future, a link in the lineage of Christ, Matthew 1:5. In similar fashion, as it turns out, families are formed, careers are determined, and eternity is affected by casual deeds. Nothing is immaterial, inconsequential, or unimportant. Rather, in all our ways, we should acknowledge Him, Proverbs 3:6.

*Your work, O Lord, is often quiet and hidden. I look forward to the day it is made known. Till then I walk by faith. In the reliable name of Providence, Amen.*
March 19

“May He...make all your plans succeed,” Psalms 20:4.

The word “succeed” actually meant to fulfill. Often the term referred to the ability of God to finish something, to keep His word, I Kings 8:15,24; Ezekiel 12:28. The emphasis rested on the accomplishment of intentions, the success of plans.

In the text above, the Lord was asked to bless the king with victory in battle, Psalms 20:5. The psalm was originally a farewell to soldiers going to war, Psalms 20:7,8. It was a prayer for God to protect the troops, Psalms 20:1,2.

The simple petition was devoid of pride in military skill. Only reliance on God was mentioned. He alone would give success. There was no boast of former triumphs, no suggestion of human bravery. The appeal for help was directed to one Name—the God of Jacob, Psalms 20:1. As in the days of that patriarch, so it will be. Jehovah will answer in times of “distress,” Genesis 35:3; cf. Psalms 37:4; 145:14-19.

In Your salvation we rejoice;
In Your name we stand still.
Because You have heard our plea,
Your promised protection You will fulfill.

The twentieth psalm has been read on numerous occasions where the intervention of God was sorely needed.

• A young widow quoted these verses daily for encouragement in her long struggle to raise an impoverished family.

• Thirteen coal miners sang these immortal words over and over while imprisoned in a blackened tomb hundreds of feet below the surface of the earth.

• Missionaries referred to this psalm as a benediction before their departure to work on distant shores.

In each case, this song has served as a lighthouse during the storms of life. On occasions of danger, people begged God to “answer” them when they “called,” Psalms 20:9.

The devout can boldly ask the Lord to grant their requests. When trouble comes, the prayers of the saints are heard. Nothing is too big for Him to handle or too small for Him to care. We can be certain He will respond, Psalms 20:6. If the “hairs of our head” are numbered, surely the prayers of our heart are answered, I John 5:14,15.

When life is precarious, You are near. When disaster is close, You are closer.
Let me not hesitate to call for help. Your shoulders are broad. Your hands are strong. What need I fear? I pray, in the name of my Lord, Amen.
“Though you already know...I want to remind you,” Jude 5.

Christians must remember their covenant obligations. They must “avoid every kind of evil,” I Thessalonians 5:22. In the assembly of the saints, there are agents of satan setting in the pew, Jude 12,13. They have slipped in undetected. They are dangerous imposters, “godless men,” Jude 4. Vigilance is necessary.

Evil doers have always infiltrated the ranks of the faithful. Their corrosive influence corrupts the Body of Christ, the children of God. In the end, these evil doers “pay the penalty,” II Peter 2:12. They suffer an unhappy end because they sell their souls for momentary pleasure. They live in a fantasy world of sin, Jude 11. Eventually they learn that sleeping around results in a rude awakening!

The saints must contend for the faith that was entrusted to them, Jude 3. They should “conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ,” Philippians 1:27a. The Lord made His light to shine in their hearts, II Corinthians 4:6. The grace of God must not be twisted “into a license for immorality,” Jude 4b.

- **The evil speak abusively of truth,** Jude 10a. Anything out of their sphere of knowledge is considered worthless. This is hardly a surprise. “Spiritual things are spiritually discerned,” I Corinthians 2:14. Since evil men lack spiritual discernment, they are blind to—and contemptuous of—spiritual realities.

- **The evil ignore what they know,** Jude 10b. They know the decrees of God, Romans 1:32. Yet they allow their physical inclinations to control their lives. They value fleshly pursuits. They lose all awareness of spiritual things. They live exclusively in the land of the carnal.

  “(They) pollute their own bodies…and slander celestial beings.” Jude 8.

Their abusive speech is the product of their spiritual corruption. They are born with an ear to hear God but their ears have become dull. They are deaf to spiritual things, Matthew 13:14,15. Self-control is ignored. Purity is ridiculed. “They follow their own evil desires,” Jude 16.

Those who surrender to the base drives of the flesh are content to ignore God. “They walk in darkness,” Psalms 82:5. They are willingly misinformed (though they pretend to know the truth), Proverbs 18:13. They are the vilest of the vile, Romans 1:28-31. They are beasts controlled by sensuous appetites. This is their shame. Destruction is their fate, Galatians 6:8. Christians must not fall prey to such empty perversion.

*O God, may Your Spirit fill every nook and cranny of my heart.*
*I want to leave no room for the devil. Give me ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to obey. In the name of Your sinless Son, Amen.*
March 21

“I chose you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last,” John 15:16.

Jesus takes the initiative. He chooses us. It is a free, independent, spontaneous selection. The option of divine election always resides in God, Deuteronomy 7:7,8; Ephesians 1:11. Disciples do not enlist. They are called. Their choice is to accept what has been offered. They place themselves under God. There are no misgivings about who is in charge.

“You are My friends if you do what I command,” John 15:14.

The disciples did not come to Him—clinging to Him with a white-knuckled embrace. They did not beg Him to appoint them to His mission. He came to them—knowing their limitations, seeing the potential of their ministry. Against the background of that amazing grace, they moved ahead with hope in Christ, I Thessalonians 1:3.

• The friendship. Followers of Jesus are treated like friends. They are privy to His intentions. They know the goal before they accept His commission. A slave “does not know his master’s business.” A disciple does, John 15:15. The Lord chose His friends, appointed them “to go and to bear fruit,” John 15:16. The appointment was a deliberate choice for a special task, I Corinthians 12:28; I Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 1:1,2.

• The assignment. Our assignment is not an onerous burden but a great honor. We go in order to bear fruit. Those who remain in Christ are fruit bearers, John 15:4. The choosing and the fruit bearing are part of the same package. Disciples are equipped for their ministry. They bear fruit because they remain in the Lord, John 15:5.


As the disciples remain, so their fruit lasts, John 15:16. They were selected to attract others into the family of God, to the goodness of the Christian life, Matthew 5:14-16; I Corinthians 10:31-33.

Fruit bearing, then, is a twofold truth. While it refers to the righteous attributes of grace in the followers of Christ, Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:9; Hebrews 12:11, it also includes bringing lost souls to Him, John 4:36; Colossians 1:6b. Fruit bearing implies nurturing saints as well as rescuing sinners. He chooses us so that He can “make His appeal through us” to redeem others, II Corinthians 5:20.

March 22

“Truth is nowhere to be found,” Isaiah 59:15.

Those who returned from exile were disappointed. God had promised them prosperity, Zechariah 1:17. Yet they suffered hardship. The people had abandoned all notions of righteousness, Isaiah 59:4; Jeremiah 9:4-6. Their sin turned God away, Isaiah 59:1-3.

The moral poverty of Israel was appalling, Isaiah 59:15b,16. She wanted better days but found none, Isaiah 59:9-11. Israel had offended the Lord. She acknowledged her iniquity, Isaiah 59:12-14. But she lacked the moral courage to change.

Right was sent away.
Wrong was invited to stay.

The problem was a lack of truth. Honesty had vanished. Lying became acceptable. Falsehood replaced fact. The fabric of life crumbled. The people did not care. They had resigned themselves to deception. It was easier to be dishonest. Truth was “nowhere to be found,” Isaiah 59:15a; Jeremiah 7:28.

This is not mere poetry from the pen of an irate prophet. Quite to the contrary! God wanted to bless His people. He begged them to seek righteousness. They were comfortable in sin. They failed to see the place of truth in society.

• **Truth is the basis of justice.** Courts of law exist to discover the facts. To everyone involved—whether judge, jury, lawyer, or witness—honesty must be the goal, I Corinthians 4:2. Justice depends on finding the truth. Otherwise the judicial system is hopelessly lost in a morass of deceit.

• **Truth is the cornerstone of kindness.** When giving praise is anticipated, the question of truthfulness arises. Is the recipient genuinely praiseworthy? If not, praise becomes dangerous flattery, Proverbs 29:5. The standard of goodness is lowered. Any accolade becomes self-serving guile.

• **Truth is the foundation of religion.** Faith should embrace evidence. Piety must rest in reality, John 4:23. Without a correct concept of deity, faith wanders down the path of idolatry. Truth is distorted. Worship becomes unacceptable, Romans 1:18-23.

Our nation is in peril. Justice ought to be in our courts. Kindness ought to permeate our lives, Ephesians 4:32; II Timothy 2:24. Truth ought to guide our Churches. But integrity is lost. The nation is doomed, Hosea 4:1-3. The only hope for a cure resides in the Lord, II Chronicles 7:13,14. Time is short. Jehovah is our last resort, Isaiah 51:4-6.

*God in heaven, hear my plea. I live in a land of shameless immorality. Integrity is mocked. People do not care. Heal my country before it is too late. In Him, who is truth, Amen.*
March 23

“I will live among you,” Zechariah 2:10.

With the destruction of those who “scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem,” the stage was set for rebuilding the temple, Zechariah 1:18-21. The love of God for His people was reaffirmed in their release from captivity, Hosea 11:9-11. When the oppressors were oppressed, the Jews realized God was still with them.

Israel was glad because the Almighty would dwell among them, Zechariah 8:3. God would be in their midst as He was before, Exodus 25:8. The Lord chose Jerusalem as the dwelling place for His name, Deuteronomy 12:5,11. His glory would dwell in Zion, again, Psalms 74:2; 85:9. Those who were still in exile were encouraged to go to Jerusalem and enjoy the presence of Jehovah.

We must never forget,
His dwelling is set.
He comes to us below,
His presence to bestow.

His presence guaranteed the safety of the city. It attested to His renewed fellowship with Israel, Zechariah 2:12. Many nations would be joined to the Lord, Zechariah 2:11, would become His people, Isaiah 14:1,2; Zechariah 8:20-22. The kingdom of God—which had been restricted to the Jews—would include all nations, Micah 4:2.

• Importance of His presence. To a populace busy restoring the physical structures of the Holy City, the prophet reminded them of certain basic needs. A restored city was worthless without a “wall of fire” around it. A new temple was valueless unless God was its “glory,” Zechariah 2:5. In other words, if the people trusted solely in their construction efforts, their labor would be in vain, Psalms 127:1.

• Blessing of His presence. When God dwells among men, the saints should “shout and be glad,” Zechariah 2:10. This is more than a privilege. It is a command. His people should “burst forth in songs of joy,” Isaiah 52:9. God wants us to “rejoice,” Philippians 4:4. He is near. Let us be happy, Psalms 16:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16.

“Shout aloud and sing for joy...for great is the Holy One...among you,” Isaiah 12:6.

God was present in the Most Holy Place of the temple. Later, in a grander sense, He was present in His Son, John 1:14. His presence will be completed in the grandest fashion in the new heaven and new earth, Revelation 21:1-3. Surely there can be no greater joy!

Father in heaven, thank You for dwelling on earth. Your presence is vital to my well being. Fill up Your temple. I am happy You are near. In Him, who lives in me, Amen.
March 24

“There is a proper time and procedure for every matter,” Ecclesiastes 8:6.

The author of Ecclesiastes offered practical advice to the reader. Given the unpredictability of those in authority, one should exercise discretion, Ecclesiastes 8:2. Do not resist the will of the person in power “for he will do whatever he pleases,” Ecclesiastes 8:3; Proverbs 24:21,22.

There is risk in questioning the actions of a superior, Ecclesiastes 8:4; Proverbs 20:2. Expedience calls for obedience, Ecclesiastes 8:5; Proverbs 16:23. The heart of the wise remains true to the obligations of duty—knowing there is a “time” and a “procedure” for everything.

- **Time** refers to an appointed season or proper occasion. For instance, the term was used of the “rainy season,” Ezra 10:13, and the “harvest” time, Jeremiah 50:16. The idea is quite clear. Life is designed so that each component has a suitable moment, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

- **Procedure** refers to the function of government (especially to the courts of law), Deuteronomy 25:1. Hence, the word pointed to a judicial decision of man, I Kings 20:40, or the judgment of God, Ecclesiastes 12:14. The term conveyed the idea of an ordinance, custom, or manner of those in power.

The writer of Ecclesiastes envisioned the wider context of life. Certainly there is a time and place for everything. But humans are often unaware of what that might be, Ecclesiastes 8:7. Nevertheless, the inevitable is inevitable.

“No man has power over the wind to contain it; so no one has power over the day of his death,” Ecclesiastes 8:8.

The text does not issue a theory of government or guideline for civil disobedience. It suggests principles for dealing with all the authority structures of life. Everybody must come to terms with the powers that be, Ecclesiastes 8:9. People in authority should be respected. At home, in school, at work, as citizens, in Church, and under God, we are obligated to obey, Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:22; Hebrews 5:8,9; I Peter 2:13,14.

The way of submission is best (even when those in authority are unworthy), Jeremiah 29:7; Matthew 22:21. It might not seem good to submit to an evil power but it will protect one against the evil that that power can inflict, Romans 13:1-3. An injustice endured will one day be exposed for what it is, Ecclesiastes 8:10. The recognition of this inevitable event leads the wise to choose allegiance over insurrection.

_Lord, the authorities You ordained deserve my respect. May I observe the time and procedures of this world. Through Jesus, who obeyed, Amen._
March 25

“If their activity is of human origin, it will fail,” Acts 5:38.

Gamaliel was a man of great learning, Acts 5:34. He knew that time had a way of testing the schemes of men, the pretensions of human plans, Job 5:12; Proverbs 19:21; Isaiah 8:10; Matthew 15:13. The wisdom of Gamaliel prevailed, Acts 5:40.

Gamaliel was a perfect example of the moderating influence of a wise mind, Proverbs 16:21. He saw both sides of the situation. He knew how to wait. He had a deep confidence in the way things work out. Gamaliel was careful. The situation needed that type of person, Ecclesiastes 7:16-18.

- **Need for prudence.** Throughout history, the Church should have taken his advice. The saints have often been intolerant of minor differences, impatient with diverse opinions. They have not been willing (like God) to endure the ignorance of men, Acts 17:30.

- **Cruelty of intolerance.** When in the majority, people are prone to press their point. With the upper hand, they are in grave danger of considering their position correct. Intolerance rears its head. Gross cruelty follows in its wake.

Nevertheless, the suggestion of Gamaliel must not be pushed to an extreme. He advised his compatriots to be patient. Yet He did not recommend they examine the truth claims of the apostles. Gamaliel may have spoken well. Restraint was wise counsel. Perhaps, he said all he could say under the circumstances, Ecclesiastes 3:7b.

But the truth was ignored. He did not take a stand for God. He withheld a decision lest he stand against God, Acts 5:39. In such indecision, some might assume there was insufficient reason to decide. Not so! Gamaliel vacillated. He wavered “between two opinions,” I Kings 18:21.

Gamaliel aimed at neutrality. His motto was: “Whatever will be, will be.” It was a commitment to let things go, to wait on providence. He opted for no decision (except the decision to wait). He allowed the situation to play out before entering the game!

“The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways,” Proverbs 14:8.

Still prudence must not be pushed to the borders of cowardice, to straddle the fence in the name of getting along with everyone. Rather, prudence should be coupled with courage. It should be ready to take an unpopular position (if need be). Prudence should champion truth even when it goes against the grain of public opinion, Joshua 24:14,15.

Father, I look to You to find the balance between prudence and courage. It is a fine line. I have absolute confidence in Your wisdom to reveal the difference. Bless me with insight. In Him, who is wise, Amen.
March 26

“Do not test the Lord,” Deuteronomy 6:16.

The word “test” means to prove the quality of someone (or something). God often tests man, Genesis 22:1-2; Judges 2:20-22; 3:1-4. These tests are intended to refine our faith, Deuteronomy 8:2; II Chronicles 32:30,31; Psalms 26:1-3.

Unfortunately, humans get confused. They test God! It is totally inappropriate. But they do it anyway, Deuteronomy 9:7; cf. Psalms 78:18,41,56. The children of Israel were asked to fully devote themselves to Jehovah, Deuteronomy 6:5. They failed to comply. They made partial commitments. Their initial enthusiasm faded. The people tended to forget, Deuteronomy 6:12. They put God to the test.

To “test God” indicates a lack of trust. It suggests He might fail in a given situation, might behave contrary to His nature. In face of a painful disaster, a person might momentarily wonder about the goodness, justice, or wisdom of heaven. A genuine faith, however, refuses to test Him. Even when something grave happens, His past mercies are sufficient evidence of His present grace, Deuteronomy 4:9.

The greatest danger encountered by Israel was not a foreign enemy but personal doubt. They did not question the existence of God. They were fearful that He would not keep His word. Hence, they refused to follow His leadership. The sin of Israel, then, was not so much breaking the law. It was rejecting the Lawgiver, Deuteronomy 1:29-33.

- **Doubts.** God was challenged to prove Himself (as if He could not be trusted)! “Is the Lord among us or not?” Israel asked, Exodus 17:7. “Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?” they wondered, Psalms 78:18,19. The people doubted. Would the Lord act on their behalf? Putting God to the test comes from uncertainty.

- **Demands.** Israel “ vexed the Holy One of Israel,” Psalms 78:41. They questioned His ability, accused Him of unkindness, complained that He was unfair, Deuteronomy 1:26,27. Therefore, they demanded He prove Himself.

  “We want to see a miraculous sign from You,” Matthew 12:38.

The safeguard against “putting God to the test” is submitting every day to His sovereign will, Deuteronomy 6:13. It is demonstrating a readiness at all times to let God be God, Deuteronomy 6:14. It is acknowledging that He is near, that He is among us, present in our lives, Deuteronomy 6:15. If this attitude is in us, we will not require Him to demonstrate that He is the Lord! Deuteronomy 6:16.

You are divine. I am human. It is Your place to test me.
It is my place to trust You. May I never reverse this reality.
I submit to Your tests in full trust that You are the sovereign Lord. Through Jesus Christ, who is the Chief Examiner, Amen.
March 27

“I looked for a man... who would... stand... in the gap,” Ezekiel 22:30.


A “gap” or “breach” often described a break in a wall, I Kings 11:27. Ezekiel was concerned for the “gap” in the moral integrity of Israel. To “stand in the gap” meant to intercede for those doomed to destruction, Psalms 106:21-23.

- No one sounded the alarm. The influence of one person can be staggering. Had one soul been found to teach the people, to rebuke the prophets, to correct the priests, and to train the princes, Jerusalem might have been spared, Jeremiah 5:1. It was exasperating for God to find no one to issue a warning, to speak for Him.

  “In the name of Jehovah, stop! Stop what you are doing. Seek the Lord. He can be found. Call on Him. He is near. The breach must be repaired. Mend your ways. Repent before it is too late. Divine wrath is coming.”

Unfortunately, those words were never spoken. The gap in the wall was not repaired. The people were not ready for the day of the Lord, Ezekiel 13:5. Everyone believed that silence was the best policy—everyone but God, Ezekiel 3:16-19.

- Immorality ruled the day. Seasons of wickedness can occur anytime. If just one voice would sound the alarm, these eruptions of lawlessness could be nipped in the bud. Jerusalem lacked that indispensable shield of security. No voice was raised. No words were uttered. No one resisted the tide of evil. The gap was not repaired. Sin found a home in the city of God. Israel was ripe for judgment, Ezekiel 22:30,31.

God could not disregard their sin. He had to respond. The people of Judah could not stand against the power of heaven. Their wickedness invited divine vengeance. Jehovah was ready to act, Ezekiel 9:9,10. Israel was about to meet her Maker.

God was reluctant to punish. He longed to spare His people. However, the citizens of Jerusalem were indifferent. God grieved. No one blew the trumpet. No one voiced a concern. The Jews were judged by their deeds, Ezekiel 7:3,4. They brought “down on their heads” the wrath of God, Ezekiel 16:43. It was a sad (but avoidable) day.

Lord, Your patience has limits. You do not tolerate sin.
I am concerned for my nation. The people ignore You.
There are breaches in the wall. Vengeance is coming.
Give me courage to fill the gap. In Jesus name, Amen.
“There was much searching of heart.” Judges 5:15.

God sounded a call to arms. Many people “willingly offered themselves” in a fight against their cruel oppressors, Judges 4:3; 5:1,2. The song of Deborah reverberated with an eager acceptance of the challenge at hand, Judges 5:9. The people were ready to march. God “had gone ahead” of them, Judges 4:14.

Unfortunately, there was another side to the story. Many in Israel were indifferent. They deliberated among themselves but remained uninvolved. Though “there was much searching of heart,” there was no decision to act, Judges 5:16.

The “searching of heart” indicated careful thought, a diligent probing into difficult matters, Ecclesiastes 12:9. It included a serious appraisal of ideas, Job 28:27. It involved a meticulous examination of proposals, Proverbs 18:17. “Searching of heart” was a struggle with complicated issues difficult to fathom, Psalms 145:3; Proverbs 25:3; Isaiah 40:28.

Nevertheless, many stayed on the sidelines. They did not enter the conflict. They discussed the idea. They likely sympathized with the plight of the oppressed. But they took no practical steps to help. Instead, they “stayed,” they “lingered,” and they “remained” unmoved, Judges 5:17.

“Let the wise listen and add to their learning.” Proverbs 1:5a.

• The leadership displayed a cordial support for each other. There was no jealousy, no striving for pre-eminence. Deborah and Barak worked together—each one content to contribute their specialty to the task at hand, Judges 4:8-10. Leaders in the Church ought to do the same for the sake of the Gospel, I Corinthians 1:10.

• The volunteers presented a united front on the battle field. They acted as if they were engaged in a common enterprise. They “risked their very lives” in an urgent cause, Judges 5:18. As Christians, we must not simply put up with each other but support and protect one another for the advance of the kingdom, Ephesians 4:16.

• The shirkers talked a lot but did nothing. Since they did not act for God, they acted against God. They tried to be neutral but were “bitterly cursed,” Judges 5:23. The honor of heaven was at stake. The shirkers stayed home in sullen indifference. They had no zeal for the glory of the Lord, James 2:17.

“He who is not with Me is against Me,” Jesus said, Matthew 12:30. We are all responsible to do our part. Those involved in the cause of Christ are fully assured that their “labor...is not in vain,” I Corinthians 15:58. It is time to be involved.

In times of crisis, Lord, count on me to contribute with courage and conviction. I am ready. Through Him, who was fully engaged, Amen.
March 29

“I commit you to God.” Acts 20:32.

The apostle Paul was headed to Jerusalem. He was not sure what would happen once he got there, Acts 20:22,23. However, he did know that he would not see the brethren in Ephesus again, Acts 20:25. He also knew that trouble was on the horizon for this group of believers, Acts 20:29.

For three years, the apostle had constantly warned the leaders of this congregation. Heretics would arise within the Church. Grievous wounds would be inflicted on the sheep, Acts 20:30,31. Since Paul was leaving them, he placed the shepherds in the loving hands of the Lord. “I commit you to God,” he said, Acts 20:32.

The word “commit” comes from a Greek verb meaning “to present” or “to place before.” It expresses the idea of entrusting to the keeping of another, Psalms 37:5,6; Matthew 11:27. On the cross, Jesus committed His spirit to the Father, Luke 23:46. God promised to bless those who “commit whatever they do” to the Lord, Proverbs 16:3.

• **The commitment.** Paul committed to God the elders of the Church in Ephesus. He trusted the Lord to care for them. The apostle was expendable. Yet, at the same time, he was confident his example would be a powerful influence while he was absent, Acts 20:33-35. In effect, the departing missionary said,

  “I place you before the throne of heaven. I have carried you for a long time. I can carry you no longer. There is much foreboding in the days ahead. Hence, you have been delivered into the gracious care of the Good Shepherd. Walk in faith. God is with you.”

• **The farewell.** There is always sadness concerning the last time for anything: the last day of vacation, the last class in college, the last week before retirement, the last visit, or the last child leaving home. Farewells are somber occasions. So was the last meeting of Paul with these leaders. It was a heart wrenching experience, Acts 20:36-38a.

  In spite of the great memories and lingering concerns, the apostle bade them good bye. He did not allow the elders to languish in deep grief over his departure. He led them to think of the future. They were the guardians of the flock. The sheep needed tending. The shepherds must be alert. For where there are sheep, there are wolves. Though separated from their father in the faith, they would be protected by their Father in heaven. They were in good hands, Psalms 100:3.

  Heavenly Father, I commit to You those who have come to faith through me. The pain of earthly separation is soothed by Your presence. Abide with them. Keep them from the hungry wolves. Through Him, who committed Himself to You, Amen.
March 30

“Catch... the little foxes that ruin the vineyards,” Song of Songs 2:15.

A fox usually digs its own den, Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58. As a small, nocturnal animal, a fox symbolized insignificance, Nehemiah 4:3. The “little foxes” referred to the cubs which playfully dug in the freshly cultivated dirt of the vineyard. The havoc they created was the subject of many Greek poems in ancient times.

Curse the foxes—those bushy tailed vermin who dig among the vines—while we rest peacefully in our sleep.

The Song of Songs depicted a love triangle. A powerful king had taken a young, beautiful, country girl into his harem. He described her as a horse, Song of Songs 1:9. She was not impressed. He offered her gold ornaments, Song of Songs 1:11. She longed to be with her beloved—a poor shepherd lad, Song of Songs 2:10.

To the king, the girl was a coveted possession. To the shepherd, she was a wholesome companion. She longed for the joy of her former pastoral existence. Therefore, she begged the harem ladies not to arouse the passions of the king, Song of Songs 2:7.

She reserved her affection for the shepherd. Her thoughts turned to the memories of spring bursting with new life, Song of Songs 2:11-13. In her musings, she visualized the shepherd coming to visit her. His words were kind and romantic, Song of Songs 2:14. She affirmed her love for him, Song of Songs 2:16. Still she was concerned for the “little foxes” that challenged the simple affection they had for one another.

- **Her foxes.** The girl had worked as a vinedresser, Song of Songs 1:5,6. She knew the devastation caused by the “little foxes.” These feisty rascals did severe damage to the vineyard. The girl spoke figuratively of the adverse circumstances which were threatening her relationship with her shepherd.

- **Our foxes.** Little foxes waste the vineyard. Little sins ruin our closeness with God. These missteps may seem insignificant. But they wreck the soul, Galatians 5:9. They destroy the roots that nourish our inner self. They spoil the fruit of the Spirit. The little foxes of daily life must be caught. Otherwise, they will sabotage our vineyard. We must be on guard. Diligence is demanded lest our vineyard be ravaged, Psalms 80:1-3.

God plants our vineyard. He cares for it. Yet our sin can destroy it. We can undo what He did, Isaiah 5:1-7. Our little misdeeds will ruin our life as surely as our colossal mistakes. We will miss eternal bliss because of our carelessness.

Lord, I stand in constant peril. I am called to be a saint, to walk in light, to follow holiness. The little foxes plague my vineyard. Help me catch these devious critters. Jesus did. In Him, who knew no sin, Amen.
“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” Matthew 6:21.

Jesus warned against storing up perishable treasures, Matthew 6:19,20. He suggested seeking first the kingdom of God, Matthew 6:33. The reason was obvious. Whatever is deemed valuable will influence our thoughts, shape our choices, and focus our efforts.

Everyone gathers treasure. Most store it on earth. Some store it in heaven. All treasure is deposited somewhere. The heart lives where the investment resides, Luke 12:34; Romans 8:5,6; Philippians 3:19,20.

- **Bank in heaven.** If one keeps his treasure for himself, it stays on earth. If one uses it for the benefit of others, it is sent ahead to his home on high, I Timothy 6:17-19. This world is a staging area for the last journey. Therefore, we should deposit our treasure in the bank above, Matthew 19:21.


Worry is unnecessary. Seek the kingdom. Invest your wealth in helping others. Stash your treasures in heaven, Luke 12:33. Like fertilizer, riches are good only when they are spread around! Wealth is a state of mind. How it is used determines our destiny. Our investments make a statement. They indicate who (or what) we worship.


A choice must be made. And, when appropriately decided, a single-minded, worry-free journey lies ahead, I Peter 1:3,4. The choice does not preclude a home in this life, but resolves the size of house that satisfies the soul, Colossians 3:1-4.

A person going to heaven packs a light suitcase. His investments are deposited in eternity. This world passes away. Those headed toward the unclouded day are not anxious. Their heart is already in heaven, Psalms 62:10; Matthew 6:21.

The issue does not revolve around the quantity of riches. It focuses on the attitude toward the treasure. The issue is not concerned with having much but hoarding much, Luke 12:16-21. In clear language, Jesus articulated a principle for dealing with whatever treasure we possess. DEPOSIT IT IN HEAVEN BY USING IT FOR GOOD ON EARTH. Blessed are those who heed His advice, Proverbs 3:9,10.

You own all things, Lord. I need not worry. Spare me the disillusionment of trusting in earthly treasure. It is enticing but I am determined to put Your kingdom first. In the One, who gives me all I should have. Amen.
April 1

“Give me an undivided heart,” Psalms 86:11.

The term “undivided” translated a word meaning “to be united” or “to be joined.” Generally it described persons in action, doing something together, Psalms 34:3; Isaiah 52:9. It was expressed by “being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose,” Philippians 2:1,2; cf. I Corinthians 7:35.

The psalmist prayed that he would be joined to God, united in heart and mind. He wished for a oneness between Creator and creature. He longed for a closeness, identity, and interconnection with Jehovah. He wanted to blend with the Almighty in a rapturous union—he in the Lord and the Lord in him—a harmony made in heaven, John 17:20-23.

For the most part, the language of this prayer is borrowed from earlier times. Still the interest and sincerity of the writer is undiminished. He spoke of the grandeur of God, Psalms 86:8. The pagans would recognize the greatness of the Lord. They would come and worship Him, Psalms 86:9. For God alone is God, Psalms 86:10.

- **The request.** The prayer desired to focus all the intentions of the mind on the Lord, Jeremiah 24:7. The human being is awash in competing desires, interests, and passions. The flesh pulls in one direction. The spirit tugs in the other direction, Galatians 5:16,17. The saint hopes for a unity that quiets the confusion. He begs for a truce—an “undivided heart”—that seeks the Lord alone, Ezekiel 11:19,20.

  “Teach me Your way, O Lord, and I will walk in Your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear Your name, Psalms 86:11.”

- **The response.** The author asks God “to teach him His way.” Then he would be faithful to the Lord. In effect, the psalmist enlisted the help of heaven. His entreaty was based on the premise that God would answer, Psalms 86:6,7, that He had already “delivered his soul from the grave,” Psalms 86:13. It was that experience that gave voice to the hope expressed in his prayer, Psalms 86:17.

The needed rescue is a cooperative effort. The author proposed to learn the way of the Lord. This knowledge would bring a singleness of purpose. A unity of heart, a constancy of action lay ahead, Jeremiah 32:38,39. An “undivided mind” is a victory found only in union with God, Ephesians 4:22-24. There is no peace of mind, no nobility of life without unreserved devotion to Him who is the Lord of lords. Divided devotion is no devotion. It must be all or not at all, Deuteronomy 6:4,5. Such a consuming purpose—to which other interests yield—gives strength for our spiritual journey, Philippians 3:13,14.

  Lord, bring wholeness to my being. Usher me into a grand unity of purpose. Then the war will cease. A sweet surrender will envelop my tangled life. And I will be fully focused on You. In Your single-minded Son, Amen.
The word “test” suggested an effort to prove the genuineness of what was being examined, I Corinthians 3:12,13; I Timothy 3:10. According to an approved standard, a test was intended to measure the goodness of something, II Corinthians 2:9; 8:8. Christians were to involve themselves in two tests.

- **They were to learn the truth by careful examination.** Ephesians 5:8-10; Philippians 1:9,10; I Thessalonians 5:21. This protected them from the error of false teachers, I John 4:1.

- **They were also to plumb the depths of their own commitment.** II Corinthians 13:5. Specifically, they were to examine themselves when they came to the communion table, I Corinthians 11:28-31.

Christians must take their own inventory. The responsibility for spiritual authenticity rests with each believer, Galatians 6:1. And, if personal integrity was taken seriously, the deceit of assumed superiority could be avoided, Galatians 6:3.

- **The behavior required.** The believer was to test “his own actions,” Galatians 6:4a. The emphasis was placed on actual behavior rather than intended behavior. Like the Father above, the saint was to impartially judge the work he did, I Peter 1:17. This leveled the playing field, minimized the inclination to find reasons for self-commendation, II Corinthians 10:12. It is not wrong to think of oneself as worthy as long as the estimate is accurate, I Corinthians 15:10. The apostle was cautioning his readers against an inflated sense of self-value, the disease of self-deception.

  “Do not think of yourselves more highly then you ought, but rather think of yourselves with sober judgment,” Romans 12:3.

- **The caution suggested.** Instead of entertaining an exalted opinion of oneself, everybody should be clear minded. We should carefully test our accomplishments. Paul actually said, “keep testing.” In other words, the weighing ought to happen again and again. The self inventory requires constant renewal, repeated vigilance. The temptation to boast never goes away. We are to compare our accomplishments with the best we could have done, Galatians 6:4b,5. For, if we compare ourselves with others, we will likely choose others that have fewer accomplishments. The comparison ought to be with Christ. “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord,” II Corinthians 10:17. When all is said and done, it is not self-approval but divine-approval that counts, II Corinthians 10:18. Christian boasting should always be preceded by the endorsement of God.

  Father, may Your standard of measurement be the yardstick of my life. I wish to glory in You alone. To do otherwise would be vain and foolish. For all of my accomplishments are mundane. With sincere humility, I pray, in Jesus name, Amen.
Moses realized God knew him personally. He also realized God was pleased with his leadership, Exodus 33:12. But how were others to know heaven was happy with him? Exodus 33:16.

The word “pleased” implied a “favorable reception” by someone, Genesis 33:10,11; Deuteronomy 33:24. It pointed to the “good will” of God, Psalms 5:12. It suggested His “delight in” or “acceptance of” a person, Exodus 28:38.

Moses struggled with his public image. In effect, he reasoned, “If I have found favor with God, if He recognizes me as His servant, if He has called me to be a leader of His people, may He not leave others guessing. I want the grace I have found in His eyes to become apparent to them.”

This request was evidence of a strong faith. The words of Moses do not suggest doubt about his favorable standing with God. His question revealed a concern about others knowing of his acceptance with the Almighty.

- **The concern of Moses.** The golden calf event had just occurred, Exodus 32:1–4. God threatened to exterminate His people, Exodus 32:9,10. The whole scene was enormously unsettling. If the Lord annihilated Israel, the nations would assume Moses had failed, that God was not “pleased” with his leadership. Therefore, Moses asked the Lord to reaffirm His acceptance. And God did, Exodus 33:17.

- **The validation of God.** The presence of God was the validation of His favor. Cash was not the criteria. Position was not the proof. God had been with Moses in a mighty rescue, in marvelous deeds, and in answered prayer. These were the signs of His acceptance, Numbers 14:13,14; Deuteronomy 4:7; II Samuel 7:22-24. Only when Jehovah did something was Moses aware of His grace. In other words, verification of His pleasure rested on divine (rather than human) action.

The presence of God calmed a troubled heart, Psalms 31:20. It certainly eased the apprehension of Moses. The presence of God reassured him. It obviously quieted his fear. The presence of God foreshadowed a future fellowship with the Lord. Moses got to see the the glory of God. Is that not our hope, too? Psalms 73:25,26.

> Lord, I long for Your presence. I yearn for Your leadership. I need Your acceptance. I want others to know You are pleased with me. Display Your favor in my life as You see fit. Through Jesus, who purchased my approval, Amen.
At first glance, it is difficult to see the rationale for this text within its context. The passage seems out of place. The prophet mentioned a coming national disaster, Jeremiah 9:22. Then, quite abruptly, he issued advice about boasting, Jeremiah 9:23,24. To say the least, it was an odd statement, until one takes a closer look.

Perhaps, the connection between these verses is found in the political developments of the time. Babylon had invaded Judah. The king of Judah was made a vassal of Babylon. Later, the vassal rebelled against his superior, II Kings 24:1,2.

For two years, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, did nothing to Jehoiakim, the king of Judah. This was likely the time of boasting, the occasion for announcing the impending disaster. The mighty nation of Babylon would attack. Judah did not have a chance. The “wisdom,” “strength,” and “riches” of Jerusalem would be useless. And, sure enough, the city was soon plundered, II Kings 24:10-14.

- **Folly of boasting.** Any nation that boasts of its intellectual insight, military power, and material wealth will have a short history. Unless people “acknowledge” God, catastrophe awaits them. Judah “refused” to know God, Jeremiah 9:3,6. The hands of the Lord were tied. The blatant sin of Judah must be punished, Jeremiah 9:7,8. Divine justice was about to teach human pride a painful lesson!

- **Object of boasting.** God should be the object of our boasting, Psalms 34:2,3. It is legitimate to celebrate the finer qualities of human beings, Proverbs 31:28,31. It is dangerous to boast about oneself, Proverbs 27:2. “God opposes the proud,” James 4:6. Hence, it is wise to limit our boasting to the goodness of the Lord, Galatians 6:14.

>“Let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me; that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord,” Jeremiah 9:24.

Human wisdom, power, and wealth are flimsy foundations for boasting. All of them are limited, temporary, and weak. God is not. Only our knowledge of Him, our reflecting Him in our daily interaction warrants boasting. “Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy,” Leviticus 19:2. “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” Matthew 5:48. This is far more demanding, far more daunting than any standard for human bragging. “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord,” II Corinthians 10:17,18.

> Father in heaven, I acknowledge You as Lord. I boast in You alone. Your approval is my praise. Humility is my crown. Jesus is my refuge. I offer this prayer in His name, Amen.
“(God) comforts us in all our troubles,” II Corinthians 1:4.

Suffering is often misunderstood. Christians carry around the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may be revealed through them, II Corinthians 4:10. They suffer so that He may be seen. Hence, “the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives” so that we can comfort others in affliction, II Corinthians 1:5-7.

However, as we well know, much of our trouble comes from a different source. We often suffer because we are estranged from Him. Such troubles are the fruit of our sinful choices. It is the vengeance of guilt not the pain of persecution, I Peter 4:15,16.

There are, then, sufferings caused by walking in darkness. And there are sufferings caused by walking in the light. The latter is the subject of this text. God “comforts us in all our troubles” that originate from following Him. What does this mean? How does His grace give us “encouragement” and “hope” in our trials? II Thessalonians 2:16,17.

**Suffering for Christ brings new understandings of God.** He is known as “the Father of compassion,” II Corinthians 1:3. In all our “distress, He is distressed,” Isaiah 63:9. We are nearest to God when we are comforted by God. “He knows how we are framed, He remembers we are dust,” Psalms 103:14. Only in His embrace can we feel His heart. Therefore, in so many words, Paul was saying,

“I never knew, till the sufferings of Christ entered my life, how close God was to me. I never knew how rich His mercies, how tender His hug, how comforting His compassion until He mended my broken heart.”

A new conviction, a fresh understanding floods our soul when heaven soothes our troubles. The best remedy for the trials encountered in life is the comfort of God. Those who turn to Him in deep distress learn that He responds. He “comforts the downcast,” II Corinthians 7:6. They can carry their cross because He offers them a hand.

**Suffering for Christ gives us credentials for ministry.** “(God) comforts us...so that we can comfort those in...trouble,” II Corinthians 1:4. Suffering for Jesus equips us to help others. It gives us compassion because we have experienced compassion. We have personal knowledge that “in all things God works for the good of those who love Him,” Romans 8:28; cf. I Peter 5:10.

To assist others in bearing their cross, we must first carry our own. Those who suffer for Christ are encouraged by His suffering, I Peter 4:1. They neither “grow weary” nor “lose heart,” Hebrews 12:3. They have been empowered by God, II Corinthians 1:3,4.

Father of compassion, Lord of mercy, carry me gently through the school of trouble. And, when I graduate, enable me to comfort others. In Jesus, who showed me how to suffer with dignity, Amen.
“(The Lord) wants all men to be saved,” I Timothy 2:4.

The apostle urged believers to pray for “all men,” I Timothy 2:1. Their prayers were to be unbiased. No caste or clan should be excluded. No preference should be given to a particular color or country. “All men” meant everybody.

The words “all men” included everyone. For example, regardless of social class, “everybody” believed that John the Baptist was a prophet, Mark 11:32. They even wondered if he was the Christ, that is, the Messiah, Luke 3:15.

Inclusive language was also used regarding Jesus. After His baptism, “everybody” sought Him out, John 3:26. And, because of His death, “all” strata of society were given life, Romans 5:18. Everyone was made alive in Him, I Corinthians 15:22.

“The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,” Titus 2:11.

This verse indicates that every social category and every classification of human being can be redeemed. Obviously God “wants all men to be saved,” I Timothy 2:4. The Lord desires to rescue everyone without regard to rank, nationality, or race. His salvation is two dimensional. To be saved meant to be freed from the clutches of evil as well as placed in the embrace of heaven.

- **Jesus delivers everyone from sin.** This involves redemption from guilt, Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14. It includes freedom from the slavery of a sinful lifestyle, Romans 7:24,25. It protects “all of us” from the wrath of God, Ephesians 2:3-5.

- **Jesus reconciles all men to God.** A right standing before the Lord comes “through faith,” Romans 3:21,22. It results in “peace with God,” Romans 5:1. The yoke of bondage to sin is removed, Galatians 5:1. Those once alienated from God are brought near to Him, Ephesians 2:13. They are drenched in the love of the Father, Romans 5:5. They anticipate being with Him forever, Colossians 3:1-4.

God has no favorites, Romans 2:11. He does not want “anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance,” II Peter 3:9. Jesus gave Himself “as a ransom for all men,” I Timothy 2:5,6. “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me,” He said, John 12:32. But the will of God in the death of Christ requires human obedience. Messengers must proclaim the Good News, Romans 10:14. People must “come to the knowledge of the truth,” I Timothy 2:4. God is willing to save everyone if everyone is willing to be saved! It is His desire. It is my prayer.

"Lord, thank You for embracing human kind. You left no one out. May I be as inclusive as You are. This is my prayer, in the name of my Ransom, Amen."
April 7

“Men will stagger...searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it, Amos 8:12.

God was ignored. Israel worshipped in idol temples and at cult shrines, Amos 5:4,5. She rejected the warnings of the prophets, Amos 7:10-12. The people were calloused. They no longer felt a moral obligation, a need for grace, or a call to duty. Because His word was being neglected, God would stop speaking to them.

“The days are coming,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord,” Amos 8:11.

The once cherished communication from heaven would cease. The people would grope like blind men in search of a “word from the Lord,” Jeremiah 37:17. How ironic! Those who snubbed the message would clamor to find it.

• **Threat given.** The frayed forbearance of God had finally unraveled. The word of the Lord would become “rare,” I Samuel 3:1. Their hunger and thirst would be awakened by the distress of spiritual malnutrition. They would “stagger” and “wander” as disoriented and exhausted travelers, Amos 8:12. Even the “strong” would “faint,” Amos 8:13. If the hearty succumbed to the spiritual drought, how much more will the famished in faith be affected?

• **Promise received.** Though they had sinned, seekers were assured that they could find God again, Amos 5:6. However, this promise was conditional. “You will find Him if you look for Him with all your heart and with all your soul,” Deuteronomy 4:29; cf. II Chronicles 15:2. Repentance was required, Isaiah 55:6,7. But, fortunately, those who sought the Lord surely would find Him, Luke 11:10. For He was not far away, Acts 17:27.

Much is discovered when we search the word of God. Therein we discover what can be found nowhere else: a thorough equipping “for every good work,” II Timothy 3:16,17. The vitality of our soul depends on faithfully reading the Bible. To neglect it will inevitably result in spiritual starvation. Those who ignore His word and despise His instruction will finally quit hearing from Him, Acts 13:46. His word is given in grace. It is taken away in disgrace, Proverbs 1:24-28.

The scriptures encourage the saints, Romans 15:4. We do “not live by bread alone but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God,” Matthew 4:4. Hence, we should meditate on His precepts and consider His ways. We should delight in His decrees and neglect not His word, Psalms 119:16.

*O Lord, Your word is a food staple not a food supplement. It is a lamp to my feet, a light for my path. It is indispensable nourishment for my soul. I promise to read it daily, to study it regularly. Through Him, who is Your Word, Amen.*
“As I have planned, so it will be, and I have purposed so it will stand,” Isaiah 14:24.

Invasion by a powerful Assyrian army was imminent. Political alliances were useless. Military strategies were foolhardy. God was the only safe haven for Israel.

“(In Zion) His afflicted people will find refuge,” Isaiah 14:32.

The audacity of such a claim is striking. At that time, Israel was a vassal state of Assyria. Her army was pitifully outnumbered. She had absolutely no hope for victory. Yet the prophet announced that God would “crush the Assyrian” in the land of Israel, Isaiah 14:25. The King of kings had spoken. Who can change His plan? “His hand is stretched out...who can turn it back?” Isaiah 14:27.

The “plan” of God is His “counsel” or “purpose.” The Lord overturns the arrangements of men. He “foils the plans of the nations, He thwarts the purposes of the peoples,” Psalms 33:10. Any strategy they devise, any plan they propose will not stand, Isaiah 8:10. The Lord is sovereign.

- The edict of God. The counsel of God is eternal. His plans are based on His unchanging nature. The success of His decrees is guaranteed, Isaiah 49:8-11. God knows. Hence, He can foretell the future. His foreordained purposes are not subject to revision, Acts 2:23; 4:28; 5:38,39; Ephesians 1:11. The sure foundation of Christian faith rests on the “unchanging nature of His purpose,” Hebrews 6:17.

- The security of Israel. The emphasis of Isaiah rested on the double use of the word “this.” “This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all the nations,” Isaiah 14:26. The plan of God was not only to crush Assyria but to rescue Israel. Neither human ambition nor military power would alter the outcome. “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?” Psalms 2:1.

This is a relevant message for our day. Dictators, rogue governments, and terrorists surface regularly seeking world dominance. Is history controlled by the whims of mortals? If the Lord Almighty has purposed, who can challenge His plans? “Surely, as I have planned, so it will be,” says the Lord, “and as I have purposed, so it will stand,” Isaiah 14:24. God is in control, Psalms 22:27,28; 66:7; 103:19; 145:13.

It is reassuring to hear the words of the Lord. The arrogance of men will come to nothing. It always has. It always will. The Lord reigns. His power will not be annulled. “God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in time of trouble. Therefore, we will not fear,” Psalms 46:1,2. And God, as expected, kept His word, II Chronicles 32:20,21.

The upheavals of history are not my concern. No threat, no violence, no war will deter Your rule. My confidence, O God, resides in Your sovereignty alone. You are the Master. Through Him, who is Lord of lords, Amen.
April 9

“You are worth more than many sparrows,” Luke 12:7.

Jesus issued a call to courage. He urged perseverance in times of persecution. His reasons were powerfully persuasive.

- **Persecution is limited.** The adversary can only harm the body. He cannot touch the soul, Luke 12:4,5. The infinite power of God makes the finite power of man trifling. It is wise, then, to look for security in the Lord.

- **Providence can be trusted.** Persecution—even death—may be the lot of the believer. But harm does not occur without the consent of God, Luke 12:6,7. His care has no limits.

- **Capitulation has consequences.** Those who renounced Him are renounced by Him, Luke 12:8-10. The courage of convictions has eternal implications.

- **Heaven will help.** The Spirit of God will provide wisdom, Matthew 10:17-20. Disciples will be given the right words to defend themselves, Luke 21:15.

These are significant truths. Every person has immeasurable value in the eyes of the Lord, Luke 12:22-24. Calvary made that quite clear.

Jesus said we were “worth more” than many sparrows, Luke 12:7. The root meaning of “worth more” is “to differ,” Romans 12:6a; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 15:41. By implication, Jesus declared that humans surpass birds in value, Matthew 6:26.

Smaller objects often have lesser worth. Sparrows are little. Pennies are insignificant. These birds were cheap. In the market, two were sold for a penny, Matthew 10:29, five were bought for two pennies, Luke 12:6a. Yet God treats them as precious treasures.

Believers are often killed. Sparrows frequently “fall to the ground,” Matthew 10:29. Still the Lord always notices.

“Not one of them is forgotten by God,” Luke 12:6.

Our comfort is not in being kept from harm. It is in knowing heaven is aware we hurt. Because He knows, because He cares our suffering has meaning, 1 Peter 4:16. “If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed,” Peter wrote. “For the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you,” 1 Peter 4:14. Absolutely nothing could be more valuable than that.

*Since You are with me, who can be against me, Lord? You are my strength, my refuge, my security. I am surely worth more than sparrows. Thank You, Jesus, Amen.*
David wrote a song of thanksgiving. He had been delivered from his enemies, II Samuel 22:1. In the song, God was seen as a rescuer, II Samuel 22:2,3. This is an important reminder amidst threatening circumstances.

More than once, God plucked His servant out of the jaws of death, II Samuel 22:4,18. In the darkest night, Jehovah caused the light of His deliverance to shine. Truly, God was the lamp of David, II Samuel 22:29.

In ancient times, a lamp was a small clay bowl. Olive oil was poured into the bowl, Exodus 27:20. Several threads of flax were twisted between thumb and index finger to make a wick. The word of God was likened to the flickering flame of an oil lamp, Psalms 119:105. It revealed enough of the path ahead to safely take the next step.

- **Light of God.** Light stood for the presence of God, Revelation 22:5; cf. John 8:12; I John 1:5. When a lamp was burning in a home, it indicated that all was well. When the lamp was extinguished, it signaled that calamity had struck, Job 21:17.

- **Light of His word.** Because of the close association with the Lord, the word of His messenger was also called light, John 5:35; II Peter 1:19. The significance lies in the light that it gives to those who received it.

  Father, lead us by Your light,
  Shine Your lamp upon our way.
  Dispels the shadows of the night,
  So we can see Your unclouded day.

Sometimes the righteous find themselves in the dark. But they have a lamp—the Father of “heavenly lights,” James 1:17. Through Him, their darkness is made bright. He turns night into day, fear into hope. Indeed, He is our “everlasting light,” Isaiah 60:20.

The difference between the righteous and the unrighteous in how they treat the light. The light of God shines in the darkness, John 1:5. Sinners do not want it. They prefer the dark lest their deeds are “exposed,” John 3:19,20. For “the lamp of the Lord searches the spirit of a man; it searches out his inmost being,” Proverbs 20:27.

A believer welcomes the light. He eagerly comes to it. He wants others to plainly see “that what he has done has been done through God,” John 3:21. What a difference! The righteous want the light, Psalms 97:11. They use it as a guide, enjoy it as a companion.

  Lord, You are the lamp of heaven. There is no night there.
  For You are its light. I long to join You in that bright land of endless day. Through Him, who is the light of my life, Amen.
“O Lord, I beg You...teach us how to bring up the boy,” Judges 13:8.

Manoah was pleading for help. He did not doubt the promise of a son. He was merely overwhelmed by the enormity of raising a child.

Children are a serious responsibility. They require special training, Ephesians 6:4. Every child will become what he is taught, Proverbs 22:6. The rigors of parenting call for help. Hence, Manoah begged for assistance from above.

“Teach us how,” he asked, Judges 13:8.

He needed assistance to “bring up” his son. The word actually meant “to do” with the underlying idea of ethical obligation. For example, Israel, as the covenant people of God, was told “to do” all that the Lord had commanded, Exodus 23:22; Deuteronomy 6:18. Manoah saw child raising as a moral responsibility.

- **Every child is a gift.** Children are a “heritage” from God, Psalms 127:3. They are born with a divine purpose. The son of Manoah was a future deliverer of Israel, Judges 13:3-5. This fact gave dignity to the task of nurturing Samson. He was a valued treasure from heaven.

- **Every child is an original.** Samson was unique. He was one-of-a-kind, a fresh edition, a special expression of divine goodness. His care was a sacred duty, Judges 13:13,14.

Manoah was genuinely concerned for the nurture of his son. “What is to be the rule of the boy’s life and work?” he inquired, Judges 13:12. Samson was to be a “Nazarite of God,” Judges 13:7. His vow was to be kept carefully, Numbers 6:1-8. It was a grave offense to neglect it, Amos 2:11,12. Moreover, Samson, the son of promise, was given “the Spirit of the Lord,” Judges 13:24,25. The lad was “blessed” by God.

- **Every child must be trained.** Children do not become mature, productive citizens on their own. Left to themselves, they will make little progress and many mistakes. They must learn to “trust” God, to be “loyal” to heaven, Psalms 78:5-8. Otherwise, their evil nature will take over, Romans 8:5-8. Such was the sad reality in the case of Samson.

- **Every child must be disciplined.** Training shapes the good that resides in the heart of children, Hebrews 12:11. Such discipline is necessary to tame the rebellious inclinations of youth. The school of morality cannot be delegated to others, Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Proverbs 1:8. Parents that realize their responsibility are on their knees begging for the guidance of the Lord.

*Father, You are the model of parenting. As one entrusted with Your precious heritage, I want the moral fortitude to train Your little ones. May my words and deeds show them the way they should live. In the name of Him who blessed the little children, Amen.*
Two different words are translated “preach.” One meant “to announce good news,” I Timothy 2:7. The other meant “to proclaim publicly,” II Corinthians 4:5. Both terms communicated an important part of the enterprise in saving human kind. Each was the “power of God” unto salvation, I Corinthians 1:18.

- **The necessity of preaching.** Public proclamation is the heart of the Great Commission, Luke 24:45-47. It is vital because faith comes through hearing the good news, Romans 10:14. The greatest success in life is saving souls. The greatest failure is neglecting to do so.

- **The foolishness of speaking.** In the New Testament, preaching had nothing to do with delivering sermons to the converted. It always referred to proclaiming salvation to the lost. In the eyes of the world, it was silly. Nevertheless, it was through “the foolishness of what was preached” that God was pleased “to save those who believe,” I Corinthians 1:21.

- **The inconsistency of silence.** There is an irony in the resurrection story. Three women approached the tomb of Jesus. They were greeted with a surprise. The tomb was empty. The Lord had arisen, Mark 16:6. They were instructed to “tell” the disciples, Mark 16:7. However, overcome by fear, the women “said nothing to anyone,” Mark 16:8.

In possession of the greatest news ever known, they remained silent! Tragically we do the same. Though instructed to “preach the good news to all creation,” we fail to share it with our closest neighbor, cf. II Kings 7:9a.

```
Help me, Lord, to share the light,
To seek Your wandering herd;
Help me, Lord, to see their plight,
To preach Your saving word.
```

Incredible! “They said nothing to anyone.” How could they keep such grand news a secret? The answer lies in the heart of every saint. We do what they did. We neglect to proclaim the greatest event in all of history.

We have heard that Jesus “brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel,” II Timothy 1:10. We have heard that God “made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions,” Ephesians 2:5. We have heard—when we were “buried with him through baptism into death”—that we arise to walk in newness of life, Romans 6:4. Yes, we have heard. But we say “nothing to anyone.”

```
Lord, You are my salvation. My silence is embarrassing. The story must be told. The news must be shared. Empower me to be Your faithful messenger. In Him, who is the message, Amen.
```
April 13

“What have You done?” Daniel 4:35.

God is sovereign. He is absolute and omnipotent. He is supreme. He has complete control
in heaven and on earth. His kingdom will endure forever.

“How great are His signs, how mighty His wonders!
His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; His dominion endures
from generation to generation,” Daniel 4:3.

No one can oppose the Lord. His power is inexhaustible. No one should question His
actions, Job 9:12; Isaiah 29:16; Romans 9:20. He is above reproach.

“All the prophets of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as He pleases
with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back
His hand or say to Him: ‘What have You done?’” Daniel 4:35.

Failure to respect His authority will result in disaster. “Woe to him who quarrels with His
maker, Isaiah 45:9. Woe to him who dismisses God as unnecessary.

• The voice of arrogance. In spite of this obvious truth, human beings often become
enamored with themselves. The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, fell prey to such
self-infatuation. “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence?” he
boasted. And, as a further expression of his pride, he said his magnificent palace was built
by his power. It was solely for the glory of his majesty, Daniel 4:30.

• The vice of pride. Such arrogance is offensive to God. He “opposes the proud,”
James 4:6. Judgment fell on Nebuchadnezzar while his haughty words “were still on his
lips,” Daniel 4:31. And, in like manner, while King Herod received the adulation of his
subjects, he was struck down by an angel of the Lord, Acts 12:21-23.

This seems to be the lesson of history. Time and time again, when men are elevated to the
summit of their power, they fall into the abyss of shame. Pride is the culprit. “When pride
comes, then comes disgrace,” Proverbs 11:2. “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty

It is a perilous venture to bask in human acclaim. It causes serious injury to self. It is a
daring rebellion against God. Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way that “those who walk
in pride” are humbled by the Lord, Daniel 4:37.

God Almighty, I glory in You alone. You are King
over all nations and all peoples. All Your ways are
right. All Your purposes are true. You are the sovereign
Lord. Teach me to walk in humility. I pray through
 Him who has all power in heaven and on earth, Amen.
April 14

“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances,” Philippians 4:11.

Paul was in prison, Philippians 1:12-14. He rejoiced in receiving a gift from his friends in Philippi, Philippians 4:10. His joy was not so much in getting material support as in knowing his brothers had compassionate hearts, Philippians 4:17. His contentment was in seeing the maturity of his converts. Their gift was “a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God,” Philippians 4:18.

• The Christian attitude. In the New Testament, being “content” is combined with “godliness.” The union of these two qualities is a great blessing, I Timothy 6:6. Contentment comes from the Lord, Philippians 4:12,13. “God is able to make all grace abound” in us, “so that in all things at all times” we will have all that we need, II Corinthians 9:8. Contentment is rejoicing that God has supplied enough in every situation, II Corinthians 9:10,11.

• The Stoic stance. Ancient Stoicism advocated a state of mind free from dependence on material things. It suggested eliminating all desire from the human heart. This was supposedly accomplished by sheer will power. Man was to extinguish all natural feelings. He was to adopt an I-do-not-care attitude, brace himself, and accept whatever happened. In short, it was an attempt to bear everything “stoically” (as we often say). The process was akin to believing one was well fed when he was actually starving!

Christian contentment is different from Stoicism. Instead of a dependence on self-emptying, it is a reliance on divine-filling. The fable of the oak and the flower captures the idea.

A little flower lived in obscurity at the base of a huge oak tree. The oak said, “I have big, strong branches.” “I have small, delicate petals,” the flower replied. Furthermore, the oak added, “I have thousands of green leaves.” “And I have a soft, sweet fragrance,” the flower responded. Are you content to be a flower?” the oak asked. “Oh, yes,” the flower answered, “because contentment is being satisfied with how God has made you, with what He has given you!”

True contentment is discovered in “Jesus Christ,” Philippians 4:19. The world presents a dilemma. It entices us to acquire things to sustain our physical life, I John 2:15-17. Yet, it quickly becomes quite clear that life does not consist of material things, I Timothy 6:7,8. Thankfully the paradox is solved when we learn to be happy with whatever we have, Proverbs 30:8; Hebrews 13:5.

Father, I am not there yet. Full contentment is still beyond my grasp. But, forgetting my shortcomings, I press on toward complete trust. Therefore, I rest content in Jesus, my Lord and my Provider, Amen.
April 15

“I am with you, declares the Lord,” Haggai 2:4.

The message of the prophet was clear. The people were to rebuild the ruined house of God, Haggai 1:4. They “obeyed” immediately, Haggai 1:12. As a result, the Lord said, “I am with you,” Haggai 1:13. What an encouragement! The presence of God was a guarantee of success in the rebuilding project. Come what may the temple would rise out of the rubble of destruction.

In the Old Testament, to be in the presence of another was to be “before the face of” that person. Hence, to be in the presence of God meant to stand before Him, to be where He was, Exodus 34:33-35. Saints stand before His face. Sinners are “thrust from” His presence. Jeremiah 15:1.

- **An enduring command.** With the assurance of His presence, the prophet coached the people to “be strong.” He encouraged them to “work,” Haggai 2:4. The same advice was given to Solomon, I Chronicles 28:10. Whenever facing a monumental task, Israel was to “be strong,” Zechariah 8:9, and “courageous,” Joshua 1:6,7,9. The circumstances did not always seem friendly but the Lord was with them.

- **A living truth.** This truth has been echoed throughout history. God was with Israel in the Exodus, Exodus 33:14. Later, His presence filled the temple, Ezekiel 43:5. Then, in Christ, He “came into the world” and “lived among us,” John 1:9,14. Now the Lord actually dwells in us, I Corinthians 3:16. He shows His majesty, reveals His grace, and unveils the intensity of His love. And, when He sends us on His mission, He promises to be with us even unto the end of the age, Matthew 28:20.

Haggai had to deal with advocates of gloom. Those who had seen the original temple were discouraged. The second house of God seemed “like nothing” in comparison.

“Who of you is left who saw the house in its former glory? How does it look to You now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? Haggai 2:3.

One can hardly miss the analogy between then and now. We struggle to advance the kingdom. Our efforts seem puny. But, to counter such a drab conclusion, we remember the words of the prophet. GOD IS WITH US! So we press on. Our work is not done. God is poised to do greater things, Haggai 2:6-9. If we are faithful to our present assignment, future blessings will surely come. However, this is not always self-evident. It requires believing that God is in our midst, II Corinthians 13:14.

*O Lord, Your presence is my watchword. I cannot proceed without You. Therefore, I will follow wherever You lead. In spite of what appears to contradict Your promise, I will trust that You remain by my side. In the name of Immanuel, God with us, Amen.*
“Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs,” Jonah 2:8.

In times of deep distress, everyone will rely on God (or a god) to deliver them. Most of the world places their future in the hands of powerless idols, Psalms 96:5. Only saints trust the sovereign Lord, Psalms 31:6. These two options should be weighted carefully. Our final decision leads to our ultimate destiny.

The story of Jonah incorporates both choices. The prophet attempted to “run away from the Lord,” Jonah 1:3. He failed. God “sent a violent storm” that threatened to sink the ship, Jonah 1:5. Jonah wisely turned to Jehovah, Jonah 2:2.

- **The peril of idolatry.** “God hurled” Jonah “into the deep,” Jonah 2:3. Later He rescued the prophet “from the pit,” Jonah 2:6. God was gracious. Jonah was taught an important lesson. “Salvation comes from the Lord,” Jonah 2:9. Jonah also learned that “those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs, Jonah 2:8.

  “Now fear the Lord and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.... But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord,” Joshua 24:14,15.

- **The power of idolatry.** Idolatry is submission to and worship of anything that is not God. Though often made of wood and stone, idols can also be ambition, popularity, and wealth. Whatever it is, an idol turns the heart of the idolater away from the Lord. Jehovah is forgotten, Jeremiah 18:15. His grace is forfeited. Disaster is not far away.

A terrible fate awaits those who chase after idol gods. Their doom is set. Their destiny is sure, Ezekiel 23:49. They refuse the richest blessings heaven can offer. They turn their back on their best Friend.

For a while, Jonah followed his idol—his decision to do things his way! It took him away from God. Idols are “nothing” yet humans bow down to them, I Corinthians 8:4. Idols are “mute” yet sinners obey them, I Corinthians 12:2. How foolish! To allow drugs, alcohol, or sex to lead us astray, is the height of folly, Colossians 3:5. All idol gods must be abandoned, I Corinthians 10:14; 1 John 5:21. Our worship belongs to the Lord alone.

You are willing and able to deliver me. Yet, Lord, I often seek You in all the wrong places. Help me flee idolatry lest I forfeit Your grace. You are the Master. I need no other. You are the God of gods. There is none like You. Through Jesus, the One greater than all idols, Amen.
“Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst.” Revelation 7:16.

“Never again” grabs our attention. It focuses our interest. It kindles a welcome hope in our hearts. No more hunger! No more thirst! No more scorching heat upon our heads as we labor in the blistering sun, Isaiah 49:10.

- **The spiritual application.** What a wonderful promise! It is a relief to our aching bodies and weary souls, Psalms 121:5-8. It applies to the spiritual needs of men. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled,” Matthew 5:6; cf. John 4:13,14; 6:35; 7:37,38.

  In Him, I have found
  The satisfaction of my necessity;
  Hunger and thirst that did abound,
  Will become a distant memory.

  He alone can satisfy,
  Like nothing else I know!
  Hope and happiness multiply,
  He is the Shepherd of my soul.

- **The physical application.** Though there is an obvious spiritual meaning, the text also speaks to our physical needs, Isaiah 33:15,16. There is an end to all pain and sorrow, Isaiah 35:8-10. “He who is thirsty” will be given “drink without cost from the spring of the water of life,” Revelation 21:6. Eternal refreshment is just ahead.

  It seems too good to be true. Is the promised “never again” a mere mirage? At first glance, it seems like it. Given our present poverty ravaged world, it appears like a dream. Certainly it must have sounded that way to those who just emerged from the “great tribulation,” Revelation 7:14. But, this pledge of health and happiness is part-and-parcel of what is to come, II Peter 3:13.

  “Now the dwelling of God is with man and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away,” Revelation 21:3,4.

This is the future. Every detail is true. The promise is guaranteed. The dim light that illuminates our path today will give way to the bright light of eternity. “Now we see but a poor reflection,” I Corinthians 13:12. Later we will see the “never again” in its radiant splendor. That wonderful day is just around the corner.

  Lord, I anticipate being at Your banquet. There will be no hunger or thirst there. Thanks for inviting me. I will see You soon. In Jesus, my “Never Again,” Amen.
Nothing had changed since the exodus from Egypt, Hebrews 3:7-11. It is still possible for a believer to lose his inheritance, Hebrews 10:26,27. Members of the Body of Christ can harden their hearts, can turn away from the Lord, Hebrews 6:4-6. It is imperative, therefore, that Christians “spur one another on,” Hebrews 10:24.

• **Example of encouragement.** Encouragement calls for a renewed commitment, Hebrews 12:12. Moses encouraged Joshua to be strong, Deuteronomy 1:38; 3:28. Paul encouraged the Philippians to be more courageous, Philippians 1:14. He encouraged the Thessalonians “to live lives worthy of God,” I Thessalonians 2:11,12. The purpose of such encouragement was to rally others to do good deeds, II Thessalonians 2:16,17.

• **Need of encouragement.** Christians are to urge one another on. It prevents “turning away from the living God,” Hebrews 3:12. When a believer withdraws from his fellow Church members, he is tempted to withdraw from the Lord, Hebrews 10:25. Spiritual loneliness is the leading cause of backsliding. The assumption that one does not need encouragement is a short distance from no longer needing the Lord.

• **Place of encouragement.** The Bible does not mention churchless Christians. Our spiritual well being is nurtured in the fellowship of the faithful. The Church is a community. She is a place where burdens can be unloaded, where supportive relationships can be formed. The Church is the company of the committed helping one another “daily,” Hebrews 3:13. We all need to receive encouragement. We all need to give encouragement.

If we have a reassuring thought,  
An encouraging word to say,  
Do not hold back lest we forget,  
To share it with someone today!

Such encouragement others needing  
Kind support burdened souls anticipate,  
Give them precious food for feeding,  
Before it becomes too late!

Time is short. Delay is dangerous. Encouragement is needed “today,” Hebrews 3:13. Our faith requires food. We must “hold firmly till the end,” Hebrews 3:14. We should minister to one another “all the more” as we see “the day approaching,” Hebrews 10:25. The urgency is real. The end is near. We are in the last days, Hebrews 1:2.

Thank You, kind Father, for the Church. May I accept  
hers nurture and give her encouragement. We are  
fellow pilgrims. We need each other. In Him, who is  
coming soon, Amen.

Though Reuben disagreed with their decision, Genesis 37:21,22. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, Genesis 37:26-28. Joseph was bartered like merchandise. Then the brothers schemed to cover up their evil deed, Genesis 37:31-33.

No doubt blame was freely passed around, Genesis 42:21. No one wanted to take responsibility. Finger-pointing ensued, Genesis 42:22. Arguments followed. Yet none of this maneuvering made their guilt go away, Genesis 42:28b.

Years later their sin was exposed. Their past caught up with them. Joseph forgave his brothers. He asked them not to be “angry with themselves,” Genesis 45:5,6. He kindly explained the significance of their heartless behavior, Genesis 45:7. Finally, Joseph told them not to “quarrel” about the incident, Genesis 45:24. His advice indicated his awareness of their propensity to argue.

- **Meaning of the word.** The term “quarrel” meant to “shake,” Psalms 18:7. The trembling reflected the deep feelings of those engaged in the argument. At the outset, strife is a mere battle of words, John 6:52. But it can become an exchange of blows, James 4:1,2. “Arguments” fueled by hot passion produce hurtful “quarrels,” II Timothy 2:23.

  A Church met to consider redecorating their building. The meeting turned into a rancorous debate over the color of paint—green, blue, or white. Finally, one of the members had a suggestion. “Let’s decorate the house of the Lord in black.” “Black?” “Yes, black.” “Why black?” It appropriately represents the sadness of God for the quarreling of His children!”

- **Significance of the idea.** The brothers of Joseph were like the Church. They were members of the same family. Each of them had received undeserved forgiveness. They were traveling home. If they recognized these truths, surely they would not “quarrel on the way.” Christians are members of the same family. They are brothers and sisters in Christ, Romans 12:10; Hebrews 13:1. They have received undeserved forgiveness, Romans 5:6-8. They are headed to their eternal home, Colossians 3:1,2. They should not “quarrel on the way.”

Quarreling Christians are a contradiction. “For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen,” I John 4:20. Hence, we are given strict instructions: “Whoever loves God must also love his brother,” I John 4:21. Is our love for God demonstrated in our compassion for His children?

*Lord of love, God of grace, You have asked me to get alone with fellow believers. Yet I am prone to argue over trivia. I am guilty of pressing divisive opinions. Deliver me from being quarrelsome. Through Him, who prayed for unity, Amen.*
The wall around Jerusalem had been completely rebuilt. Then the people gathered to hear the reading of the Book of the Law of Moses, Nehemiah 8:1. They “listened attentively,” Nehemiah 8:3. They were moved to tears, Nehemiah 8:9. They wept in sorrow over their sin.

The people were encouraged to rejoice. “Do not grieve,” Nehemiah said, Nehemiah 8:10. It was a time to delight in the presence of God, to enjoy “choice food and sweet drinks,” Nehemiah 8:10. It was an occasion to celebrate their relationship with the Lord.

For “the joy of the Lord” was their strength, Nehemiah 8:10. Literally, the word for strength was “shelter,” Exodus 9:19. It was a place of “safety,” Jeremiah 4:6; 6:1. Usually the term referred to God as the “refuge” of His people, Psalms 31:2; Joel 3:16. Therefore, in the midst of sorrow, the joy of being in the Lord gave them strength to endure, Psalms 37:39; Jeremiah 16:19.

“The Lord is good, a refuge in time of trouble,” Nahum 1:7.

If the joy of the Lord was their strength, then, the strength of the Lord was their joy. The people stopped crying. They celebrated “because they now understood the words that had been made known to them,” Nehemiah 8:12.

The “joy of the Lord” is an interesting concept. Does it refer to the joy we have in the Lord? Or is it the joy the Lord has in us? It seems both meanings are possible.

- **Our joy in the Lord.** We rejoice in our fellowship with God, Psalms 33:21. It is our joy in His existence, holiness, grace, and providence. It is delight in His love and rescue, Psalms 31:7,8. This joy is a fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22. It is a gift from above. In this sense, than, the joy of the Lord is the happiness we have in Him.

- **His joy in us.** The joy of the Lord can also be His rejoicing in His work, Psalms 104:31. It can be His joy over the faithfulness of His people, Psalms 147:11; Isaiah 62:5; 65:19; Zephaniah 3:17. Thus, the joy of the Lord can be His happiness in us.

Consequently, the “joy of the Lord” has a twofold meaning: His joy in us and our joy in Him, John 15:11. Either way, we have good reason to be happy. For, at all times, a holy joy is a defense against evil, a strength in sorrow, a power to endure trying circumstances.

*Father, it is good to rejoice. My joy in You gives strength. Your joy in me gives hope. May my worship be a joyful sound, a genuine celebration of who I am in You and who You are in me. Through Jesus, my joy and strength, Amen.*
April 21

“I have made you a tester,” Jeremiah 6:27.

An army was coming, Jeremiah 6:22. The enemy was well equipped but “without mercy,” Jeremiah 6:23. Judah was paralyzed with fear, Jeremiah 6:24. Escape was impossible, Jeremiah 6:25. Bitter mourning was inevitable, Jeremiah 6:26; Amos 8:10.


What was the role of the prophet in this calamitous event? He was the “tester of metal.” The people were the “ore,” Jeremiah 6:27. A tester was an examiner, Job 34:2-4. The examination measured integrity, Genesis 42:14-16. Due to the concern of God, Jeremiah was sent to probe the genuineness of the people.


- **A fruitless effort.** Was the ministry of Jeremiah an exercise of futility? He had issued strong warnings, earnest appeals, and dire threats. No one seemed to listen. To go on trying to refine good metal out of bad ore was useless. Why even try? All such effort was “in vain, Jeremiah 6:29.

- **A barren ministry.** God gave the prophet a message to deliver, Jeremiah 1:9,10. His assignment was important though difficult, Jeremiah 1:17-19. He commenced his career with enthusiasm. He announced the message with conviction. Still the people were indifferent. They believed they were “innocent,” Jeremiah 2:35.

- **A thankless job.** The prophet plodded on. He exposed the shallow, spiritual masquerade of his audience, Jeremiah 3:19,20. He called for internal integrity not just outward performance, Jeremiah 4:3,4; cf. Romans 2:28,29. The people pretended. God knew better. They had “no understanding,” Jeremiah 4:22.

Why did Jeremiah continue? He was the target of their malicious schemes, Jeremiah 18:18. He suffered painful wounds, Jeremiah 20:2. He was the brunt of their cruel jokes, Jeremiah 20:7. Obviously the people did not care.

The value of his ministry was the fire of his conviction. He did not make many converts. But he was a model of faithfulness. He had to speak the word of God. He could not “hold it in.” Otherwise, it would be like “burning fire” in his bones, Jeremiah 20:9. So he became a tester. His words exposed the quality of the people.

Sovereign Lord! You have made me a tester. My task is hard. My body is weary. Please help me keep the fire. I cannot do this alone. In Him, who showed the way, Amen.

In ancient Israel, the devout prayed three times a day: in the morning (about 9 AM), at noon, and in the afternoon (about 3 PM), Daniel 6:10. It was assumed that prayer was more effective if it was offered in the temple. This, then, became the setting of the parable regarding those “who were confident of their own righteousness,” Luke 18:9.

A Pharisee and a tax collector went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee prayed in favor of himself, Luke 18:11,12. He boasted about his goodness. He mentioned nothing God did for him but what he did for God. Indeed, the Pharisee did not really pray. He merely informed the Lord—and everyone around him—of his own piety.


**Humility defined.** Heaven places a high value on humility. The Lord saves the humble, Psalms 18:27, “sustains the humble,” Psalms 147:6, and “gives grace to the humble,” Proverbs 3:34. The term “humble” means “lowly,” “bent down,” or “insignificant.” The Lord blesses those who “humble themselves,” II Kings 22:19. They know that in comparison to Him they were insignificant. The apostle Paul said,

“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought....Honor one another above yourself....Do not be proud, but willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited,” Romans 12:3,10,16.

**Humility required.** Surely, what the Pharisee said was true. He was not like other men. He fasted and tithed more than the law required. Still, as is common among the proud, when they blow their own horn, they pitch it too high! The Pharisee mistakenly compared himself with his fellowman. He should have measured himself with the Lord.

“Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time,” I Peter 5:5,6; cf. Psalms 138:6; Isaiah 57:15.

Remember, all of us are better than some people. None of us are better than God.

*I stand small in the presence of Your great majesty, * 
*Lord. I am an unworthy sinner. I cannot save myself.* 
*I remain on my knees, praying through Him who is * 
*perfect in every way, Amen.*
April 23

“Give me, O God, the pledge You demand.
Who else will put up security for me?”  Job 17:3.


“Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high,”  Job 16:19.

In a remarkable twist, while dangling at the end of his rope, Job asked God (of all people) to be his bail bondsman, Job 17:3. Who else was there except the Lord to whom he could turn? His friends had left him, Job 16:10. His neighbors despised him, Job 17:2.

The term “pledge” has various meanings. It signifies “to mortgage” something as promissory collateral for repaying a debt, Nehemiah 5:3. A pledge could also be “security,” a guarantee that a promise would be kept, Genesis 38:17,18,20; 43:9. In legal circles, a pledge was bail given as assurance that the accused would appear in court.

Job took a risk. He asked God—who he blamed for attacking him—to post bail. Does the accuser pledge bail for the accused? No! Yet, against all human precedent, the Lord was asked to put up security for suffering mankind. This is the predicament of the world. We have no other choice. Thus, in the words of Job, we plead:

“Give me, O God, the pledge You demand.
Who else will put up security for me?”  Job 17:3.

- **Nature is full of promise.** The message of divine kindness resonates in spring flowers and fall harvest, Acts 14:17. God loves us. He will arrange our bail.

- **Life is full of hope.** God has made us with an undying desire for truth, unyielding thirst for love, unquenchable hope for security. These exist as a pledge of their satisfaction. The Lord does not mock His children, torment with empty dreams. He will bless us.

- **Scripture is full of knowledge.** God has made Himself known. He has given Jesus as an assurance of salvation to those who trust Him, Hebrews 7:22.

Evidence of His concern is all around us. He “ensures” our “well being,” Psalms 119:122. He listens to our cry for help. He comes to our “aid,” Isaiah 38:14. He posts our bail. His pledge calms our troubled hearts, Hebrews 6:16-20. Life is good.

*I have reason to be assured. You, my Lord, have posted my bail. You have given me pledges of Your faithfulness. I anticipate the day of reckoning with confidence. Thank You. In Jesus, my bail bondsmen, Amen.*
April 24


The Israelites were on the march. They had just experienced two stunning victories. Balak, the ruler of Moab, was “terrified,” Numbers 22:2,3. He sought help from a pagan sorcerer. He hoped Balaam would curse Israel, Numbers 22:6. God took this threat seriously. “You must not put a curse on those people,” He said, Numbers 22:12.

Balaam listened to God. He could not “go beyond the command of the Lord,” Numbers 22:18. He was tenacious. “I must speak only what God puts in my mouth, Numbers 22:12,38. Though the king insisted, the heathen magician was adamant. “Did I not tell you I must do whatever the Lord says?” Numbers 23:26.

King Balak was upstaged by King Jehovah. God was in control. The anger of Balak “burned against Balaam,” Numbers 24:10. Nevertheless, though forfeiting a handsome reward, Balaam was unmoved. The pagan witch doctor was faithful to the God of Israel.

“I could not do anything of my own accord...to go beyond the command of the Lord,” Numbers 24:13.

Balaam saw that it pleased God to bless Israel. Balak tried repeatedly to coax Balaam into compromising his allegiance to Jehovah. Being convinced of the sovereignty of God, the sorcerer refused to resort to divination, Numbers 24:1. He abandoned his usual custom of seeking omens. The Lord prevailed!


- **A triumph revealed.** The champion of “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” was defeated. Though men plot against the kingdom of God, their efforts are in vain. The “powers of this dark world” are helpless. God is sovereign. Therefore, the saints should “be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power,” Ephesians 6:10-12.

Victory belongs to heaven. It has been so through the ages. The Church is on the march. The powers of darkness are feeble. In due time, the kingdom will overcome. Then the forces of satan will meekly confess: we must “do whatever the Lord says.” May that day come quickly, Isaiah 45:21-24; Romans 14:9-12.

Jehovah, Master of the universe, You ask for my allegiance. You expect my obedience. Gladly I do whatever You say. You are in control. I wait for the final victory. In Him, who has all power in heaven and on earth, Amen.
April 25

“In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord,” 1 Peter 3:15.

The apostle was addressing the subject of persecution. When called upon to suffer, first century believers focused on the Master. There was no need to be “frightened,” 1 Peter 3:13. Christ overcame persecution, 1 Peter 3:18. If Christians set Him apart as Lord, they would also overcome hurtful situations.

The way of faith includes hardship. Opposition is part of the higher calling, 1 Peter 4:12. These experiences are a blessing, 1 Peter 4:14. Therefore, if we “suffer as a Christian,” we should “not be ashamed, but praise God,” 1 Peter 4:16. That is our calling. That is our assignment.

Christ did the will of God. It included the cross. Jesus endured the pain, Hebrews 12:2,3. In our stand for the truth, when we endure hate, we “participate in the sufferings of Christ,” 1 Peter 4:13. And, if that happens, there is no need to fear our tormentor.

- **Fear of men.** Sometimes men appear to have more power to injure us than God has power to rescue us. The real danger is not what man can do to our bodies. It is what the Lord can do to our souls, Matthew 10:28. God is the ultimate security, John 14:1. We must not let the fear of men become a substitute for trust in the Lord, Psalms 34:9.

  “So, then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good,” 1 Peter 4:19.

- **Love of Christ.** Christ has a unique place in the heart of believers. The greatest treasure in life is our relationship to the Lord. Earthly things are secondary. Eventually, because of the nature of this world, everything will be left behind. He who lays up his possessions on earth is easily hurt, Matthew 6:19-21.

If the Lord is enthroned in our heart, He will not abandon us, Deuteronomy 31:6; Psalms 94:14. No misfortune can dislodge Him. Nothing will remove Him. The saint is secure, Psalms 23:4; 25:14-20; 27:1,2.

  “So we can say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me!’” Hebrews 13:6.

Even in persecution, the Christian is blessed. We may not escape suffering. And, for those who do not, suffering will make them ready for what they want most—a home in heaven.

  *Lord, You are my treasure. Hence, I am secure. No one can take You from Your unique place in my heart. This is my joy and my hope. In Christ, my Lord, Amen.*

Israel was encouraged to make fellowship offerings, Leviticus 3:1. These sacrifices expressed thanks for friendship with God, Leviticus 7:12. They were cooked on the altar “as food,” Leviticus 3:11; cf. 21:6,8,17,21; 22:25. Then the sacrifice was served as a meal of gratitude for a cordial relationship with the Lord.

Food and fellowship—a meal for God and man
That reconciled enemies and cemented friends—
A welcome respite, a happy retreat, cf. Genesis 31:54.

The fellowship offering was “an aroma pleasing to the Lord,” Leviticus 3:14-16; Numbers 28:1,2. The odor of a burnt offering was assumed to be influential in gaining favor with heaven, Leviticus 6:21; Numbers 15:10.

The sacrifice was eaten “in the presence of the Lord,” Deuteronomy 12:4-7,17,18. The feast was consumed by the offerer and his family in the house of God. In this way, the Lord showed His friendship toward His guests. The meal became a declaration—between God and man—that any breach of friendship was healed.

The symbolic meaning of eating and drinking is emphasized throughout scripture. Reconciliation, friendship, and communion were the foundation of feasts, Luke 15:22-24. So the Lord’s Supper is a solemn reminder of our friendship with God.

- **The cost of reconciliation.** The fellowship offering taught the worshipper the cost of friendship. An animal was sacrificed—butchered “before the Lord,” Leviticus 3:1,7,12. Sins were confessed, Leviticus 3:2,8,13. Till this was done, no feast was possible, no friendship was given. But once it was done, God invited the worshipper to “rejoice,” Deuteronomy 12:7. Fellowship was restored.

- **The essence of the Gospel.** Those “who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ,” Ephesians 2:13. We have “peace with God,” Romans 5:1. The gap is bridged, the rift is healed. His “flesh is real food.” His “blood is real drink,” John 6:55. This is why the communion is a time for celebration.

Our peace offering has been made. “Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God,” Ephesians 5:2. Now the Lord wants to spread “through us everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him,” II Corinthians 2:14. We have been blessed. He wants us to be a blessing, to be a pleasing aroma in the world.

*God, my friend in heaven, I am humbled by the thought of being a pleasing aroma. I celebrate the blessing and accept the challenge.*

*In Christ Jesus, my fragrance before the throne, Amen.*
April 27

“What is it?” Exodus 16:15.

The exodus required Israel to leave the comforts of Egypt. The route to Sinai took them through a dry, barren wasteland. Celebration quickly turned to complaint, Exodus 16:2,3.

The desert was a hostile environment. Water was in short supply, Exodus 15:22. Enemies butchered those who lagged behind, Deuteronomy 25:17,18. Joy over the rescue of heaven soon disintegrated into frustration over circumstances on earth.

God sent them “bread,” Exodus 16:4a. When they saw it on the “ground,” the people asked, “What is it?” Moses said it was bread from the Lord, Exodus 16:14,15. It was “the grain of heaven,” Psalms 78:23,24.

The purpose of the manna was to teach dependence on the word of the Lord, Deuteronomy 8:3. In effect, the manna was a test, Exodus 16:4b; Deuteronomy 8:16. The survival of Israel depended on following the instruction of God, Exodus 15:26. The manna was also a gift. It provided Israel with food. It gave them lessons “for generations to come,” Exodus 16:22,23. It showed them who God was.

- **He was the God of possibility.** The Lord spread a table in the desert. The people deemed such a thing an impossibility, Psalms 78:19. Grudgingly they learned He was the God of inexhaustible resources, cf. Philippines 4:19. They had no reason to be afraid, Deuteronomy 1:29-31.

- **He was the God of faithfulness.** The Lord sent them manna “each day” according to their need, Exodus 16:4. The regularity of the provision was a proof of His faithfulness, Psalms 119:89,90. It was so then. It is so now.

- **He was the God of revelation.** The manna was a demonstration of His glory, Exodus 16:6,7. In a similar way, the multiplication of the loaves pointed to Jesus as the bread of (eternal) life, John 6:31-40. It was not the prayer of the people that produced the manna. They offered no prayer. God found in Himself the reason to help them, Deuteronomy 9:4-6.

  “He saved them for His name’s sake,” Psalms 106:8.

Did Israel understand? No! She continued to complain. “We never see anything but this manna!” Numbers 11:6. How ungrateful. The same rebuke applies—for the same reason—to our grumbling today, I Corinthians 10:10. We enjoy the handiwork of God but seem unaware of Him. We uncomprehendingly ask, “What is it?”

*Father, You have blessed me daily. How dare I complain!  
May Your majestic presence fill my heart and close my mouth.  
Through Him, who is the bread of life, Amen.*
It is difficult to grasp the exact meaning of this text. It lacks a specific context. One thing is certain. The command assumes that the Spirit can be stifled. The warning is helpful. The activity of the Spirit is to be encouraged. His promptings must not be ignored. He is important for several reasons.

- **He gives life.** The Spirit renews spiritual vitality, Titus 3:5b. In the hospital of God, He is the medicine. We must not resist the healing.

- **He is a flame.** The Spirit melts the rebellious will, John 16:7,8. In the foundry of God, He is the furnace. We must not turn down the heat.

- **He gives light.** The Spirit illuminates the truth, John 16:13. He clarifies the way ahead. We must not put out the fire.

The words “put out” mean to “extinguish.” The Lord “will not snuff out” a smoldering wick, Matthew 12:20. The lamps of the foolish virgins were “going out,” Matthew 25:8. The fire of eternal punishment “is not quenched,” Mark 9:48. To “put out the Spirit’s fire,” then, refers to restraining His work, I Thessalonians 5:19. The caution to keep the flame of the Spirit burning can be applied to ourselves and to the scriptures.

- **Ourselves.** The Holy Spirit is a gift from God, Acts 2:38,39. He must not be neglected. Through carelessness, the sacred fire can be suffocated. The Spirit will depart, I Samuel 16:14. That is a frightening thought. No warmth. No empowerment. No guidance. No flash of spiritual perception to illuminate the dark chambers of the soul.

- **Scriptures.** The inspired word is the sword of the Spirit, Ephesians 6:17. Yet the Bible can be read as a dead letter, a lifeless message. This smothers the Spirit. The words of God are robbed of their life giving potential. The bored reader searches the pages but finds no spark. He views the word of God as a burdensome book.

It behooves us to keep the embers burning. Only then can the fire of the Spirit shed a warm glow in our lives. Otherwise many noble impulses die without producing fruit. The Spirit is squelched by hostile reactions. This “grieves” Him, Ephesians 4:30. Because of a refusal to do something required, the disobedient “resist the Spirit,” Acts 7:51. Those who do so are guilty of “insulting Him,” Hebrews 10:29. The danger is real. The consequences are serious. Eternity hangs in the balance.

You, Lord, have given me Your Spirit. He is essential to my spiritual safety. Life is a maze of bewildering shafts and tunnels. I must not put out the flame. Please, Spirit of grace, illumine me. Show me the way. In my Savior, who sent the Spirit, Amen.
“All a man’s ways seem right to him,” Proverbs 21:2.

Humans examine the exterior. God probes the heart, I Samuel 16:7. Little wonder, then, that the assessments of men are often at variance with the conclusions of heaven. “All a man’s ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighted by the Lord,” Proverbs 16:2.

This saying is not a criticism of the self-righteous—those who are proud of their piety, cf. Matthew 23:25,26. Rather it speaks to the cause of faulty moral evaluation.

- **Poor standard.** People usually compare themselves with others. This is “not wise,” II Corinthians 10:12. The Lord does the measuring. Though a man may assume he is right, God will decide the matter, Proverbs 14:12; 16:25.

- **Self deception.** “The human heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure,” Jeremiah 17:9. Notwithstanding, the Lord searches the heart in order to reward men according to their deeds, Jeremiah 17:10. Fools ignore the appraisal of God. The righteous listen to His advice, Proverbs 12:15.

It is really amazing how people are duped into thinking well of themselves. What they ought to know best they actually know least. They assume they are right when they are wrong. They imagine themselves to be doing the will of the Lord while in fact they are injuring His cause. Is this not true of those who crucified the Christ? Luke 23:34a. Is it not true of Saul when he persecuted the Church? I Timothy 1:12,13. Is it not true of people throughout history who pressed their opinions at the expense of others?

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life,” Proverbs 4:23.

Eternity depends in large part on the condition of the heart. It is the moral compass for human conduct. Therefore, we are encouraged to be vigilant. “The Lord tests the heart,” Proverbs 17:3. Only the fool relaxes in the pleasant feeling that his life is fine. We are instructed “to do what is right,” Proverbs 21:3. The evaluation of God rather than the assessment of men determines the outcome.

People frequently object to His conclusions. “The way of the Lord is not just,” they complain, Ezekiel 18:25,29; 33:17,20. If that means He does not use the standards of men, it is quite correct. God has His own scales. They are accurate. He knows us better than we know ourselves, Psalms 139:1-4. He repays according to what we do, Proverbs 24:12. He does not make mistakes.

Righteous Lord, the examiner of my heart,
I ask You to forgive me of my self-approval.
Guide my steps. Lead me in the way of truth.
I ask this in the name of the One who knows
me better than I know myself, Amen.
April 30

“The hand of the Lord was upon him,” Ezekiel 1:3.

Ezekiel felt the presence of God. He was vividly conscious of the divine impact on his life, Ezekiel 3:22; 8:1; 33:22; 40:1. The words “hand of the Lord” signified power over a person (or object), II Samuel 24:14. The hand of the Lord is “strong,” Psalms 89:13. He “upholds” the righteous, Psalms 37:23,24; 139:9,10. Ezekiel was under the power of God, strengthened by heaven as he began his difficult ministry.

The prophet knew God was near. “The hand of the Lord was upon him,” Ezekiel 1:3b. Jehovah enabled Ezekiel to fulfill his assignment. A few years later, Nehemiah felt the same confirmation from the Lord, Nehemiah 2:8b.

• **The symbolism.** The hand is a symbol of action, direction, empowerment, and control. A prophet could not complete his task by simply hearing the word of the Lord, Ezekiel 1:3a. The spokesman for Jehovah was obligated to do something. The relationship between God and man is top down—a Creator who commands and a creature who obeys.

  “Ah, Sovereign Lord,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.” But the Lord said to me, “Do not say ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you and say whatever I command you” Jeremiah 1:6,7.

• **The significance.** People need the word of God. They also need to obey God. One without the other is only half enough. The Lord said to Ezekiel, “I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning for Me,” Ezekiel 3:17.

We are urged to do the same. Submission to the hand of the Lord can clear away the obstacles that obstruct obedience. Though the audience may be “rebellious,” “obstinate,” and “stubborn,” God will give strength equal to the effort, Ezekiel 2:3-7.

  “The high and lofty One says...I live in a high and holy place, but am also with him who is contrite and lowly,” Isaiah 57:15.

The Lord was with the prophet. He promises to be with us. He will make His home in us. “If anyone loves Me,” Jesus affirmed, “he will obey My teaching. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him,” John 14:23. We have a close connection—an intimate friendship—with the Lord, I John 1:3; Revelation 3:20. Should that not energize us to fulfill His calling.

  Lord, I do not walk alone. You are in me. Give me Your message. Empower me to speak. Show me the way. Because Your hand is upon me, Amen.
May 1

“See to it that no one misses the grace of God,” Hebrews 12:15.

Past heroes of the faith cheer on contemporary believers. Therefore, we are asked to remove anything that would hinder the running of our spiritual race, Hebrews 12:1. Strong discipline is required, I Corinthians 9:24-27; Hebrews 12:7-11.

We can avoid harmful distractions if we concentrate on Jesus, Hebrews 12:2,3; cf. Colossians 3:1-4. His life is a perfect example of overcoming hardship. When struggling against sin, Hebrews 12:4, when “feeble” and “weak,” Hebrews 12:12, the Lord is our source of grace, Hebrews 4:14-16.

God gives grace. Grace is essential to spiritual victory. Humans can lose it. We are encouraged to exercise sober vigilance. Otherwise the gift from above will be forfeited, II Corinthians 6:1; Hebrews 3:12; cf. Jonah 2:8.

• **Missing the grace of God.** Christians are compared to a band of pilgrims. While on their journey, they must check for stragglers. Has anyone been left behind? It is easy to wander off the path. In so doing, the believer “turns away from the living God,” Hebrews 3:14-16. He “misses the grace of God,” Hebrews 12:15. Through carelessness, he loses his salvation. Hence, believers are advised to be watchful.

• **Becoming a bitter root.** If anyone loses the grace of God, it is a loss to him and to others. The wayward become a “bitter root,” Hebrews 12:15. The expression was originally applied to a person who went after strange gods. They encouraged others to do the same, Deuteronomy 29:18. These wanderers became a poisonous influence in the community of faith. They treated religion as a personal choice. They failed to see their interdependence with fellow believers.

> “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it,” I Corinthians 12:27.

Those who stray from the grace of God become noxious weeds. They “cause trouble and defile many,” Hebrews 12:15. They must be removed like Achan who “brought trouble,” on Israel, Joshua 7:25.

We should “make level paths...so that the lame may not be disabled,” Hebrews 12:13. While the care of the saints is the particular responsibility of the elders, I Peter 5:1-3, every member of the Church ought to watch over his brothers and sisters. Such accountability is an expression of “equal concern for each other,” I Corinthians 12:25; cf. Romans 14:19. Let us, then, be careful lest we miss the grace of God.

> Holy Father, deliver me from evil. Remind me that the pleasures of the present are no comparison to the glories of the future. May I never lose Your grace. Through Jesus, my Lord, Amen.
While away on military maneuvers, David and his men suffered a severe setback. Their homes were destroyed. Their families were kidnapped, I Samuel 30:1,2. The soldiers were devastated, I Samuel 30:3,4. Nevertheless, in the midst of the crisis, David “found strength in the Lord,” I Samuel 30:6.

David was encouraged by God to pursue the Amalekite raiders, I Samuel 30:7,8. Because of the long march, some of the men were overcome with exhaustion. They stayed behind, I Samuel 30:9,10. The rest of the troops engaged the enemy.

The mission was successful. The families were rescued. The household goods were recovered, I Samuel 30:18-20. But, when the army was reunited, “troublemakers” refused to share the plunder with those who stayed behind, I Samuel 30:22. Pride stifled kindness.

- **Effects of pride.** Arrogance inflates the ego. It breeds conceit. It is common for the successful to be “arrogant,” Psalms 73:3-8. They scorn the lowly. They refuse to hobnob with the unaccomplished. Their humility is drowned in self-importance.

  
  “Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position,” Romans 12:16.

- **Gestures of kindness.** David resisted such selfishness. It violated the grace of God, I Samuel 30:23. It was contrary to the will of heaven, Numbers 31:27, and the practice of Israel, Joshua 22:8. David demanded that the reward of those who stayed behind should be the same as those who went to battle. “All will share alike,” he said, I Samuel 30:24. Staying with the baggage was as important as fighting on the front.

The principle of equality must be maintained. “All will share alike” is a watchword in the kingdom of heaven. Every member of the Church is “baptized by one Spirit into one body,” I Corinthians 12:12,13. Endowed with a diversity of functions, all members contribute to the same purpose.

In a similar vein, God “does not despise men,” Job 36:5. He “does not show favoritism,” Acts 10:34. He loves the outcast, welcomes the poor, embraces the weak, and helps the weary. In other words, the keeper of the “supplies” is as important as the carrier of the sword. The occupant of the pew is as valuable as the person in the pulpit. Could anything be clearer? The judgment of David, the nature of the Church, and the character of God call for an equality in the community of faith.

Gracious God, equality in a competitive world is a challenge. Nevertheless, Your will is unmistakable. Help me put people above prosperity. May I share alike with everyone. In Jesus, who humbled Himself, Amen.
“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God,” Ecclesiastes 5:1.

Worship should bring us into the presence of the Almighty. Does it? The mind should be focused on righteousness, attuned to His will, riveted to His grandeur. Is it? We should bow our heads, sing the songs, and hear the sermon. Does that make us different?

Worship should change the worshipper. Whether confronted, encouraged, or refreshed, Church is intended to transform us. Like a patient discharged from the hospital, we should be better after being there. This will happen when a few guidelines are followed.

- **Watch your step.** Be careful. Think what you are doing. It is a mockery to engage in worship without meaning what is said or done. It is “the sacrifice of fools,” Ecclesiastes 5:1. Worship is not about enjoying yourself. It is not about having fun or feeling good. It is about “listening,” about obeying, I Samuel 15:22. Worship is confronting God, doing His will, Matthew 7:21.

- **Let your words be few.** We are warned against empty babbling, Matthew 6:7,8. People think the more words they use, the more likely God will hear. But He is not deaf. A torrent of talk is like a dropped cell phone connection. The worshipper keeps talking oblivious to the fact that heaven is not listening. The more words the less meaning. The highest form of worship is not giving but receiving from God, not talking but listening to Him, Jeremiah 7:21-26. Let your words be few, Ecclesiastes 5:2,3.

- **Mean what you say.** When we make a promise to God, be sure to keep it, Deuteronomy 23:21-23; cf. Psalms 66:13,14; 116:12-14. To make excuses (for not keeping promises) is to tamper with honesty, to play fast and loose with conscience. Such foolishness has eternal consequences, Ecclesiastes 5:4-6.

  If, in faith, we leap
  A promised vow to keep;
  Repent, if it is broken, weep;
  Lest His wrath we reap.

Idle chatter, especially pious chatter, is no substitute for a sincere respect for God, Ecclesiastes 5:7. The tongue must be bridled, James 1:26; 3:5,6.

- **Stand in awe of God.** Wherever we assemble, whenever we convene to worship, God is present, Habakkuk 2:20; Zechariah 2:13. It is not the elegance of the place or the beauty of the ritual that matters. Worship is holy ground, John 4:23,24. God is there, Matthew 18:20. It is sobering to stand in the presence of the Lord God Almighty.

  Majestic God, I approach Your throne with care. I am overwhelmed by Your willingness to accept my humble worship. May I never take that for granted. In His name, who alone is worthy to set at Your side, Amen.
May 4

“They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.” Hosea 8:7.

Israel made “idols for themselves,” Hosea 8:4. Their idols were not God, Hosea 8:6. Jehovah is not made by man. He is the Maker of man.

How silly for humans to think they could make God. Surely they knew better. Sadly, however, Israel had forgotten her Creator, Hosea 8:14a; cf. Romans 1:21-23. She knew better but failed to do better. “All have turned away.” They have together become worthless. “There is no one who does good, not even one,” Romans 3:12.

What, then, should we expect? If we have sown the wind, will we not reap the whirlwind? Yes! It is the law of life. Our present activity determines our future destiny.

• **Rule in farming.** Sowing and reaping is a common figure of speech, Job 4:8; Proverbs 22:8a; Hosea 10:13a. It is a rule of agriculture. “A man reaps what he sows,” Galatians 6:7. That does not take rocket science to understand. If we sow wheat, we harvest wheat. And, if we sow sin, we will reap the consequences of sin, Galatians 6:8. We always eat the fruit of our ways, Proverbs 1:31.

  Life is like a quilt;
  The pattern is our own.
  Be it innocence or guilt,
  We reap what we have sown.

• **Law of living.** Surprised? Of course not! We see this law played out every day. The effects of sin are predictable. When humans embrace evil, trouble lies ahead. Nothing is more certain. The rule of cause and effect permeates the physical world. “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously,” II Corinthians 9:6. The same principle effects the spiritual realm. “Friendship with the world is hatred toward God,” James 4:4.

Initially, sin is like a gentle breeze. But, if we continue participating in sin, it will become a strong wind. And, with habitual indulgence, it will become a destructive storm. It is true. We “sow the wind and reap the whirlwind,” Hosea 8:7.

Sin will sink its claws into the sinner. A day of reckoning is sure to come. It will come suddenly “without remedy,” Proverbs 29:1. People will be caught unprepared, Matthew 24:37-39, unable to escape, I Thessalonians 5:2, though they will try to do so, Revelation 6:15-17. Be careful, then, lest your sins find you out.

  You have warned me, Lord. I reap what I sow.
  The outcome is certain. Help me scatter seeds of
  righteousness so that I may sing songs of joy.
  In Christ Jesus, my Savior, Amen.
May 5


In the Bible, the ability to know God lies in the “heart,” Ephesians 1:18; 4:18; Hebrews 10:16. But sin causes the heart to resist God. Sinners are unable to submit to Him, Romans 8:6,7. Faith, then, is a gift from heaven. As the apostle John wrote,

“The Son of God...has given us understanding,” I John 5:20a.


The Christian life is not a self-improvement project. We are all wretched sinners until the Lord rescues us. We work out our deliverance as God works in us to do His will, Philippians 2:12,13. Spiritual deliverance is a cooperative effort involving the grace of God and the obedience of man.

- **Man must accept the truth.** The truth will make us free, John 8:32. Freedom from sin is the gateway to eternal salvation. To find such freedom, humans must “hear” and “acknowledge” the truth, Ephesians 1:13; II Timothy 3:7. They must also “receive” and “believe” the truth, Acts 13:48; Hebrews 10:26. This will enable them to “obey” and “walk” in the truth, Galatians 5:7; III John 3. However, the Gospel—as powerful as it is—cannot by itself move man to accept the truth. There is a natural, internal resistance to the way of the Lord.

- **God must restore the heart.** The heart of improvement is the improvement of the heart. Good intentions alone are as useless as walking west in a train traveling east. The Lord must “restore us” so the “we may be saved,” Psalms 80:3. The power of heaven coupled with the strength of truth is our only hope, Psalms 119:33-40. Humans by themselves do not comprehend the truth. Without the Spirit of God, man cannot understand the way of God, I Corinthians 2:14. No increase in light can cause a blind person to see. Neither can God make truth anymore true. A change must be worked in the heart “so that we can know Him better,” Ephesians 1:17.

Opening of the heart—so that man may respond—is the initial step in spiritual birth, John 3:5,6. It gives direction to the mind, Jeremiah 24:7; II Corinthians 4:6. It nudges man to turn toward the Lord. Evidence for rebirth is lacking until the soul surrenders to God. Yet, when submission occurs, there will be room in the heart for God to live inside of man, I Corinthians 6:19,20.

May 6

“I have had enough, Lord,” I Kings 19:4.


While alone in the desert, he cried out, “I have had enough,” I Kings 19:4. The prophet became despondent. He agonized over his situation. He wanted to die, I Kings 19:3b,4a,b.

Who understands such awful pain
That descends like unwelcome rain?
It often comes from stressful times,
Robbing peace from happy minds!

Why was Elijah so down? How did he deal with his despair? What does God want us to learn from this unique story?

• **Cause of despair.** The threat of Jezebel is not enough to explain the distress of of Elijah. There was more involved. (1) He was weary. The long journey had left him exhausted and hungry, I Kings 19:7. (2) He thought he was a failure. His ministry seemed unsuccessful, I Kings 19:10. His efforts changed no one. (3) He felt alone. “I am the only one left,” Elijah said, I Kings 19:14. Isolation tries the soul, II Timothy 4:16. (4) He left his post. Elijah was on the run. He had abandoned his responsibility. When busy hands are idle, clouds of hopelessness can soon obscure reality.

• **Cure of despair.** God helped the prophet overcome his despondence. (1) He was fed by an angel. Twice a messenger from heaven visited Elijah, I Kings 19:5-7. The despair of the mind was lessened by nourishing the body. (2) He heard the voice of God. Elijah might have expected the Lord to present Himself in stunning displays of power. Instead, God came in a “gentle whisper,” I Kings 19:11,12. In other words, Elijah learned that Jehovah would do His work in a quiet way, Isaiah 42:1-4. (3) He accepted a new assignment. God had more work for Elijah to do, I Kings 19:15. His futility melted when he became busy again. The best escape from the pit of melancholy is to lift another person from the prison of despair.

The Lord encourages the down cast, I Kings 19:18; cf. Psalms 27:14. He sets them free, Psalms 118:5. The despondent must reconnect with their purpose in life. They must busy themselves in a positive enterprise. For God does not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline, I Timothy 1:7. He calls us out of our tear filled retreat. He invites us to escape the darkness, to bask in the sunshine of His presence.

In time of need, Lord, You put me in large places. Give me a task near at hand which can dispel the gloom that hides the distant goal. I pray in the name of Jesus, my Refuge, Amen.
“Only a few will find it,” Matthew 7:14.

Jesus refocused the popular conceptions about the kingdom. He set forth the obligations for becoming part of it. And, then, He offered a welcoming invitation. “Enter,” He said, Matthew 7:13. It was an open call to “whosoever wishes” let him come, Revelation 22:17.

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life,” Matthew 7:13,14.

• **The choices.** A deliberate decision must be made. No one drifts into the kingdom of heaven. The narrow gate calls for self-restraint, Isaiah 35:8. Nothing impure will enter through it, Revelation 21:27. The wide gate allows self-indulgence. It permits a free and undisciplined expression of wayward behavior.

• **The decisions.** The gate that is chosen will resemble the destination. They do not lead to the same place. This makes the choice important. For the gate of entry becomes the highway to eternity. The alternatives are before us. Which one will we choose?

Human nature prefers the easy way. The path is wide, the pleasures are abundant. The road to destruction is all downhill. It seems right at first. In the end, however, the results are disastrous, Proverbs 16:25. The hard way is narrow, steep, and demanding, Matthew 16:24. It is not a romp in the park. It requires buffeting the body, guarding the heart, and bridling the tongue. “If it is hard for the righteousness to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” I Peter 4:18.


There is a choice to make,
A path of life to take;
Whether the road be high or low,
All must decide which way to go.

Jesus was addressing those who had heard His words, Matthew 7:24,26. They were aware of the options. They responded with a question: “Are only a few people going to be saved?” Luke 13:23. They knew few would accept the hardships. Few would practice the disciplines, Matthew 7:14. His words were not a license to estimate the population of heaven or hell. They were a challenge to “make every effort to enter the narrow door,” Luke 13:24. For, it is the narrow door that leads to everlasting life.

*Father, I daily stand at the crossroads. The choice is mine. Though it requires a sacrifice, I willingly enter the narrow gate. Give me the strength to persevere. In Him, who made a similar choice, Amen.*
May 8


There are a cluster of psalms that speak about confidence in God, Psalms 4; 11; 16; 23; 27; 131. Each expresses an assurance in the ability and willingness of the Lord to help in the hour of need. Certainty of His assistance lies in His greatness, Psalms 62:1,2. When circumstances are ripe to “topple” those who trust in God, the saints remain firm, Psalms 62:4. Their hope rests in the Lord.

“Trust in Him at all times; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge,” Psalms 62:8.

• The reality. We have a “rock” on which to stand, a “salvation” about which to rejoice, a “fortress” in which to be safe, Psalms 62:5,6. This realization comes from waiting quietly in the midst of desperate situations.

• The resolve. The psalmist took a position from which he was determined not to retreat. “I will never be shaken,” he said, Psalms 62:2. This was not a blind bravado, a whistling in the dark. He knew he was a “leaning wall,” a “tottering fence,” Psalms 62:3. He anticipated moments of insecurity. Yet he resolved to “depend on God,” Psalms 62:7.

• The option. Humans can trust in “worthless idols,” Psalms 31:6, or place their hope in “great riches,” Psalms 49:6. They can rely on others, Psalms 118:8, or they can lean on their own “righteousness,” Ezekiel 33:13. But all of these choices lead to the same destination—shame and disgrace. The believer knows to trust in God alone, Psalms 31:14.

• The outcome. Those who hope in the Lord will be delivered, Psalms 22:4. Their prayers will be answered, I Chronicles 5:20. They will “rejoice,” Psalms 33:21, and sleep in “perfect peace,” Psalms 4:8; Isaiah 26:3.

Such assurance is a profound blessing, Proverbs 16:20. We are encouraged to “trust in Him at all times,” Psalms 62:8, to let Him carry our burdens, I Peter 5:7; cf. Psalms 68:19.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God,” Philippians 4:6.

This unflinching confidence is based on two realities: the power and the love of the Lord, Psalms 62:11,12. His power makes Him able. His love makes Him willing. God can if we let Him, Isaiah 50:10. “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him,” Jeremiah 17:7.

“Do not be discouraged,” Joshua 8:1.

Every believer has highs and lows. Every life has its moments—times of success and occasions of failure. Those who learn from their mistakes gain the victory, Philippians 3:12-14.

Armyes that win wars often lose battles. They profit from their setbacks. From time to time, it may appear hopeless, but they do not lose heart. They refuse to surrender. They continue on in spite of the circumstances.

Israel enjoyed a marvelous victory at Jericho, Joshua 6:20. A few days later they were soundly defeated at Ai, Joshua 7:8. Their hearts “melted,” Joshua 7:5b. But God encouraged them. “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged,” Joshua 8:1.

- **Failure comes to those who try.** A baby does not learn to walk without falling. A champion earns the crown by enduring occasional defeat. An inventor makes discoveries through improving failures. Those who never fail are those who never try. The art of success is turning disappointments into steppingstones. In other words, success is gained by repeated effort, nourished by relentless hope.

- **Success comes to those who try again.** Joshua was deeply disturbed by the setback at Ai, Joshua 7:6-9. Rather than give up, however, he learned from the failure. God told him to “stand up,” to face the situation and move on, Joshua 7:10. Once the impeding element was removed, Joshua renewed the attack, Joshua 8:3-8.


SUCCESS COMES TO THOSE WHO TRY AGAIN.

Life can seem like an endless series of failures. The Lord invites us to take heart. He told us not to be “discouraged,” Joshua 1:9. He promised to be with us. There is no need to be demoralized into inaction, Deuteronomy 31:8. Though denied at first, success often comes from subsequent effort. “Let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up,” Galatians 6:9.

Merciful Lord, God of second chances, discouragement can be overcome. Out of the wreckage of my failure, You can give me success, if I try again. Thank You. In Christ, who triumphed over apparent defeat, I submit this humble petition, Amen.
May 10

“Accept him whose faith is weak,” Romans 14:1.

Paul addresses those who are strong in the Lord. He asks them to care for the weak in faith. He urges them to differentiate the essentials of salvation from matters of opinion. These notions can include such things as personal diet or religious festival, Colossians 2:16-18. The apostle wanted “a spirit of unity” to prevail in the Church, Romans 15:5,6. Therefore, he encouraged believers to welcome the weak.

- **Who are the weak in faith?** They see religion as law keeping. Their lives are governed by rules, Colossians 2:20-23. They have not discovered freedom in Christ, Galatians 5:1. The weak in faith try to earn their salvation. They do not fully understand grace. They dwell on what they should do for God rather than what God did for them, Ephesians 2:8,9.

- **How should they be treated?** The apostle gave directions for defusing potentially explosive situations. He commanded the strong to refrain from judging the opinions of the weak, Romans 14:1,13. The weak are required to do the same, Romans 14:3. No one should “look down” on anyone else, Romans 14:10. Rather members of the Church are to show respect for one another, Romans 14:19. Their opinions should be kept between themselves and God, Romans 14:22.

- **Why should the weak be accepted?** The body of Christ is a fellowship of the faithful. Faith in Jesus Christ has drawn them together. Faith should keep them together. Arguments over matters of opinion can easily end in division. Diversity of ideas is both the mark of freedom in Christ and the test of membership in the family of God.


The Lord died for the weak in faith, Romans 14:15. Christians should be motivated by love rather than bent on winning debates. Such is “pleasing to God and approved by men,” Romans 14:18. Where God has not spoken, man must not argue. The Church should not allow an attitude that delights in defeating others in discussion. It causes enormous damage, Romans 14:20. Arguments may be won but souls are lost.

Christians must not “humiliate” one another, I Corinthians 11:22. They must not put an “obstacle” in the path of a brother, Romans 14:13; I Corinthians 8:9-13. They are to “help” the weak, Acts 20:35. The strong are to “become weak” toward those who are “weak.” In effect, they ought to “become all things to all men” so that by all possible means they might save some, I Corinthians 9:22,23. If God is patient with us, ought we not to be patient with one another? I Thessalonians 5:14,15.

Lord, help me distinguish between the essential and the optional. I must deny myself instead of destroy my fellow believer. May I be a peacemaker rather than a troublemaker. In Him, who was strong yet gentle, Amen.
“Having a form of godliness,” II Timothy 3:5.

Deceitful fakery is common in religious circles. Those who express such spiritual shallowness are full of blatant hypocrisy, II Timothy 4:3,4. They are fraudulent pretenders.

“How nothing to do with them,” II Timothy 3:5b.

- **Description of shallow religion.** Those possessing a “form of godliness” are entrenched in evil, II Timothy 3:2-4. They wear a mask of piety that hides the reality of their corruption, II Timothy 3:5a. They have no spiritual power because they lack spiritual substance. Their words honor God but their actions deny Him, Titus 1:16.

Such people may attend Church. They go through the motions of correct and dignified worship. They maintain the external form—a semblance or appearance of the real thing. They act like children of God but their faith is a charade.

There is no examination of the heart, no sorrow for sin, no love of truth, no conformity to the will of God. They do not change their behavior, Romans 2:17-24. Those who have the form but deny the power are anemic imposters of genuine believers. They may appear to be followers of Jesus, but they are not transformed followers, Romans 12:2.

- **Expression of shallow religion.** Those who have a mere “form of godliness” are self-centered. They are “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,” II Timothy 3:4. The word “rather” means “in the place of.” Self in the place of God is the worst kind of irreverence. It is religious shallowness motivated by “evil desires,” II Timothy 3:6; intolerant of “sound doctrine,” II Timothy 4:3.

Christian forms are present in many places: public prayer and private ceremony. The proper words are uttered. Yet the power is absent. Those who have a “form of godliness” do not reject religion. Instead, they regularly participate in it. They pray. They sing. They discuss. But they do not expect (or experience) the transforming power.

Right ritual does not constitute right religion. Without the power, it is simply a veneer that lacks the renewing force of the resurrected Christ, II Corinthians 5:15. Godliness is a beautiful thing, a contagious expression of faith. The danger is in being satisfied with the outer shell, the lifeless exterior of spirituality. It is a mockery, pretense without power.

Authentic godliness is a proper attitude toward God. It is the path to joy here and hereafter, I Timothy 4:8. It is the basis of right teaching, I Timothy 6:3,4, the bridge to Christian virtue, II Peter 1:5-7. Genuine godliness is nurtured by thoughts of eternity, II Peter 3:11,12a. It is not an external performance. It is an internal extreme makeover.

_Father, empty forms of religion abound. I want no part of them. Make me a lover of authentic godliness. Send the transforming power. In Jesus, Your Son, Amen._
“Multitudes in the valley of decision,” Joel 3:14.

The “valley of decision” is a metaphor for judgment. The nations are gathered before the tribunal of God, Joel 3:12. Like vine keepers harvesting grapes, the angels dispense the justice of heaven, Joel 3:13. It is a dark and dreadful day of punishment, Joel 1:15; 2:1,2.

Heretofore, in the book of Joel, the nations are scarcely mentioned. Now the prophet sees the Lord summoning them to the valley of decision, Joel 3:14. The nations are ripe for judgment. Their crime is cruelty against the people of God, Joel 3:2-6; cf. Obadiah 11; Nahum 3:18,19. The Lord took note of their violence, Joel 3:19. Their sins sealed their fate.

The nations are judged on the basis of their morals. National error brings divine wrath, Jeremiah 25:30,31. Ethical standards underlie (and explain) the rise and fall of empires. Nations reap what they sow. It is the clear lesson of history. As clay in the hand of the potter, the nations live and die under the just rule of God, Jeremiah 18:5-10.

• A symbol of power. The valley of decision is an impressive display of divine sovereignty. God is in control, Psalms 113:4-6. His power is reflected in nature: the raging storm and the roaring thunder, Joel 3:15,16a. The judgment of the nations is always an awesome event, Psalms 9:19,20.

The valley of decision is a dreadful plain,
Where God will act in decisive power again.
He is the only hope and stay
For the nations that are about to pass away.

• An area of remorse. The valley of decision is a place of regret. The nations are in the grip of an angry God, Zephaniah 3:8. There is little hope for a last minute stay of execution, no possibility of escape. His “wrath will be directed to their destruction,” Isaiah 10:25. The day of reckoning was about to begin.

• A call to repentance. Calamity approaches. It marches forward with irresistible strength. The nations must mend their ways, stop the moral hemorrhaging that dooms their existence, Joel 2:12. There is hope if they repent, Joel 2:13,14. Haste is advised. God will hear from heaven. He will forgive their sin. He will heal their land, II Chronicles 7:13,14.

Today the nations are again assembled in the valley of decision. They stand before the bar of heaven. They wait to hear the judgment of God. What will the Almighty say?

O, Lord, the valley of decision is near. The future of the world rests in Your hands. May I be a light to the nations, a beacon of rescue for those who wander in moral darkness. In the name of the One who sets enthroned above earth. Amen.
May 13

“Show me…the number of my days,” Psalms 39:4.

The psalmist guarded his behavior, kept his tongue under control, Psalms 39:1. He suffered an unspecified “blow” from the hand of God, a disciplinary “rebuke” from the Almighty, Psalms 39:10,11.

Suppressed speech can bring increased grief, Psalms 39:2,3. It burns like “fire in the bones,” Jeremiah 20:9. Eventually pent up feelings will burst into hot emotions. A torrent of words can reduce the pressure. So the psalmist poured out his heart to God, Psalms 39:5.

The poet petitions for wise discernment to grasp the brevity of his existence, Psalms 39:4; 90:10. Time on earth is short—here today and gone tomorrow, James 4:14.

Every living thing
Hangs on a slender thread;
Held by a feeble string,
We march toward the dead.

Life appears to be a vast funeral procession. Work and pleasure seem vain, Psalms 39:6. Everything is uncertain. Even the healthy pass away without warning. Only the fool thinks everyone is mortal but himself! “Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom,” Psalms 90:12.

• **What is ahead?** The psalmist makes no reference to future life. Rather he speaks of a time when he will be “no more,” Psalms 39:13. Truly our days are few. But, if we hope in God, we know that life is not an illusion, a chasing after shadows. Our funeral is not the end. We take hold of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

• **Why believe?** Because He lives, we will live, John 14:19. Those who trust in Him have “an eternal house in heaven,” II Corinthians 5:1. A believer is not haunted by triviality. His “enduring city” is just ahead, Hebrews 13:14. God is his hope, Psalms 39:7.

• **Is it worth it?** The righteous will have trying times. Faith is not an escape from reality. Yet heaven will limit the struggle. And, in due time, the faithful will be delivered. Our task is to be patient. He promises to hear our prayers, John 14:14; I John 5:14,15.

Jesus “brought life and immortality to light,” II Timothy 1:10. He has given all men hope, I Peter 1:3. Though temporarily separated from us, He is busy preparing a place for us. He is coming back soon to take us home to live with Him forever, John 14:1-3.

*I look forward to that happy day, Lord, when Your Son will return. Teach me to number my days. I realize the shortness of life is a reminder of eternity. In Christ Jesus, whose time on earth was short but meaningful, Amen.*
May 14

“To whom will you compare Me?” Isaiah 40:25.

The prophet asked five questions. Each question pointed to the unassailable supremacy of Jehovah, Isaiah 40:12-14. He is the one and only deity, Psalms 18:31. He is beyond the highest imagination of the human mind. Beyond comparison, beyond equal, Jehovah stands alone as the Sovereign God of the universe.

“To whom, then, will you compare God?” Isaiah 40:18.

Israel was disheartened. She languished in exile. She wondered whether the Lord was really able to rescue her, Isaiah 40:27. Jehovah is the Creator. He is the Judge of the nations. But can He save His people? The prophet overwhelmingly believed that He could. Indeed, Isaiah believed that God would save Israel, Isaiah 40:29-31.

• **He is supreme.** His authority is above challenge. He is the only God—the God of gods, Lord of lords, King of kings. There is no other, Isaiah 43:10; 44:6-8; 45:5,6; 46:9. The message is clear: Jehovah is greater than the super powers. He is greater than all of the rulers of the earth combined. “The nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales,” Isaiah 40:15. They are actually “less than nothing,” Isaiah 40:17. But Jehovah “sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,” Isaiah 40:22.

• **He is able.** Faced with such spectacular evidence of His power, how could Israel doubt His ability to rescue her from exile? God is not weary. He does not get tired, Israel 40:28. He knows the plight of His people. They need not complain, Lamentations 3:39. The exile is part of the plan of the Almighty, Lamentations 3:31-33. The captives were fearful they would disappear in exile. The prophet tells them to look up. Consider the stars, Isaiah 40:26. He who called the stars into existence—who placed them in the heavens—can be trusted. He will not abandon His people. He will not let them fade into oblivion.

  So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My righteous right hand, Isaiah 41:10.

Under the pain of adverse circumstances, one gains little comfort from the human scene. To maintain balance, to move forward with assurance, one must gaze skyward. The power, the orderliness, and the grandeur of Him who controls the heavens suggests that He is in control of things on earth, Romans 1:20. It is reassuring to observe the majesty of God while we wait for the fulfillment of His plans.

  Sovereign Lord, my trust rests in You. There is no problem You cannot solve. I wait in confidence for Your plans to unfold. Thank You for being in control. Through Jesus, who has all power in heaven and on earth, Amen.
“Nothing will be impossible for you,” Matthew 17:20.

The disciples failed to heal an epileptic boy, Matthew 17:15,16. The lad was demon possessed, Mark 9:17,18. Jesus attributed their failure to a lack of faith. Though given “authority to drive out evil spirits,” they were still unable to do so, Matthew 10:1.

The “unbelief” of the disciples was not a complete lack of faith. They believed. They simply had “little faith,” Matthew 17:19,20a. They believed Jesus. They merely lacked confidence in His empowering them (of all people) to drive out demons. Faith about Him is quite different from faith in Him.

- **Connecting to the power source.** Genuine faith connects man to the source of power. When firmly plugged into the power of heaven, man can move mountains.

  > The disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” He replied, “Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move,” Matthew 17:19,20.

Jesus employed a folk saying. A mountain mover was anyone who could resolve great difficulties. Thus, moving mountains meant that faith in God enables man to remove the impeding barriers which obstruct their path, Ephesians 3:20,21.

- **Receiving from the source of power.** People should bring to Him their daunting perplexities, vexing questions, and impossible situations. He will give them strength to overcome their weakness, II Corinthians 12:9,10. If we would fully trust Him, we could do great things. We could defy all the odds along the way. We could swim the deepest ocean, climb the highest hill, and move the biggest mountain, Matthew 17:20b.

Like the disciples, contemporary believers have “little faith.” They do not really believe that God will act in their lives. “Little faith” leaves us with anxiety, Matthew 6:28-30. It hinders spiritual perception, Matthew 16:8. “Little faith” causes us to be timid in times of peril, Matthew 8:26. It leaves us unable to cast out the demons in our own lives. Our greatest limitation is accepting limitation. How long will He continue to put up with us? Matthew 17:17.

The Lord drove out the demons, Matthew 17:18. The boy was healed. “Nothing is impossible with God,” Luke 1:37. Nothing which we see as impossible (due to our weakness) is the measure of His ability. Given the shallowness of our faith, no wonder we accomplish so little. Indeed, it is amazing that we accomplish anything at all!

*Holy Father, I cannot live the maximum life with a minimum faith. Help me trust in You. Send me Your strength that I may be a mountain mover. In Him, who can do all things, Amen.*
“No one else dared join them,” Acts 5:13.

The Church had just passed through a trying time. Under false pretense, two of her members gave a generous gift to the congregation, Acts 5:1,2. They were charged with lying to the Holy Spirit, Acts 5:3,4. Their punishment was swift and severe, Acts 5:5-10.

The effect of the discipline was far reaching. “Great fear seized the whole Church and all who heard about these events,” Acts 5:11. A healthy Church is a community of faith where an esteem for God is maintained at all costs.

Non-Christians were strongly affected. They held the believers in high regard. Yet they did not want to be seen with them in the temple courtyard, Acts 5:12,13. A fear of public reprisal overwhelmed their private feelings of respect. Fear is an enormous persuader. It influences behavior in both the physical and spiritual arenas of life.

- **Physical fear.** Humans are afraid when their security is threatened, Genesis 32:7,8; Numbers 14:9. Consequently, Joseph was afraid to bring his family back to Judea, Matthew 2:22. But God, in Christ, delivers us from such fear, Romans 8:15. A love for the Lord—that is nurtured by deep trust—dispels fear, I John 4:17,18. Believers no longer are beset by a tail-between-the-legs timidity, II Timothy 1:7. They are freed from the bondage of worry over bodily harm and public insult.

- **Spiritual fear.** The faithful are those who fear God, Luke 1:50. They are inspired by an intense commitment to the will of heaven—whatever it asks and wherever it leads. Though delivered from carnal fear, believers remain in awe of the Lord, Romans 11:17-21. The overpowering presence of the sovereign Lord propels the faithful to serve Him “with fear and trembling,” Philippians 2:12,13.

The Church begins and grows by “walking in the fear of the Lord,” Acts 9:31. To worship God goes hand in hand with a reverent respect for Him as the Creator and Judge of all men, Revelation 14:6,7; 15:3,4. Obedience is encouraged by fear of His holy name, Deuteronomy 6:1,2,13.

“Fear the Lord your God and serve Him,” Deuteronomy 10:20.

Christians are in danger of identifying with the crowd. They shrink back from proclaiming the Gospel and living a moral life. The danger is not a cell block or concentration camp. They fear the laughter of the world. In private, God is respected. In public, He is shunned. This is so common. But it is not right. The Lord is not pleased. The Church is disgraced. The respect of God is trumped by the fear of men.

*Lord of glory, God of greatness, You deserve, indeed, You demand complete respect. Your awesome power motivates my obedience. May my love for You conquer my dread of men. In Him, who loved You in all situations, Amen.*
“My spirit grows faint within me,” Psalms 142:3.

The deepest sorrow of the soul is a sense of being abandoned, Psalms 142:4. The poet was alone. He was surrounded with “trouble,” Psalms 142:1,2. His heart disintegrated. He melted into a puddle of tears. In desperation, he turned to God, Psalms 142:5,6.

The psalm expresses the feeling of one who is hurt, forsaken, and exhausted. He is described as “pursued,” “crushed,” “dismayed,” and “faint,” Psalms 143:3,4. The author wanted a quick response from God. He wanted a response that showed him the way he should go, Psalms 143:7,8.

The psalmist was weak like a starving child deprived of food, Lamentations 2:11,12,19. His soul thirsted for the Redeemer like a “parched land” waiting for rain, Psalms 143:6. He longed for deliverance from distress, Psalms 143:11.

“The troubles of my heart have multiplied,” he said, Psalms 25:16-18.

- **Tale of woe.** At first glance, the psalm sounds like a monologue of self pity. But his plight must not be dismissed so quickly. His feelings were real. His enemies were hateful. His friends were indifferent. A “prison” of circumstances suffocated his spirit, Psalms 142:7. His mind was gripped with despondence. His sanity was threatened. There was no apparent refuge to which he could retreat for relief. So he turned to God, Psalms 141:8-10.

- **Cry of help.** When in trouble, people instinctively look up. They flood the throne room of heaven with their agonized cry for help, Psalms 18:6. God knows. He cares. He delivers, Psalms 18:2,3. If one believes the Lord knows, believes the Lord understands, assurance blossoms again. A quiet and steady peace envelops the soul.

- **Way of life.** History is filled with examples of faithful saints in the valley of despair. Called to serve, they were vilified and betrayed. Still they found calm amidst the storm, Jeremiah 15:15. The “man of sorrows” did, too. In His hour of greatest grief, He committed Himself to the Father, Luke 23:46. The righteous may hurt in this life, but trust in God is the way to eternal life.

Spiritual discipline in the school of hard knocks will continue till Christ returns. Those who graduate learn to be content in whatever state they find themselves, Philippians 4:12. They are persuaded that nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus their Lord, Romans 8:37-39.

Father of mercy, God of rescue, thanks for being my refuge when I hurt. Life often throws me into a dungeon of despair. Your kindness transforms my darkness into light. Through Your strength, come what may, I can be more than a conqueror. Confidently I pray in Christ, Amen.
“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts,” Jeremiah 31:33.

God intended to make a new covenant, Jeremiah 31:31. The old agreement had been broken. It was no longer operative, Jeremiah 31:32. A fresh arrangement between heaven and earth was about to unfold.

A covenant described the relationship between two parties. In the case of a biblical covenant, it was the relationship between God and man. The covenant outlined what God would do for man. An appreciative response was expected from man. In other words, the Lord said, “I will be their God and they will be my people,” Jeremiah 31:33b.

The people tended to bask in what God did for them. They were reluctant to recognize what they should do for God, Jeremiah 7:24-26; 11:7,8. The weak link was the human heart. It is “deceitful above all things,” Jeremiah 17:9. Every effort at compliance was stymied by the corruption in man. The new covenant was an attempt by God to fix the situation.

• **Weakness of the old covenant.** The old covenant was written on “tablets of stone,” Exodus 31:18. The new one would be written in the minds and on the hearts of men, Jeremiah 31:33; II Corinthians 3:3. An inner response would replace outer demand.

• **Strength of the new covenant.** The old covenant was couched in human initiative. The new one would be animated by the Spirit, Galatians 5:16-18. Both covenants required obedience. The means of securing that obedience was quite different. Indeed, the first covenant was only “a shadow of the good things that were coming,” Hebrews 10:1.

> “No longer will a man teach his neighbor or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord,” Jeremiah 31:34.

For, in the time to come, the knowledge of the Lord would fill the earth “as the water covers the sea,” Isaiah 11:9. This did not imply that teaching would be obsolete. It did not suggest that evangelism would be outdated. It did not infer that mission would be abandoned. On the contrary, it merely implied that the knowledge of God would no longer be solely dependent on the instruction of men.

People “will be taught by the Lord,” Isaiah 54:13; Ephesians 1:17. Lydia is a case in point. God opened her heart, Acts 16:14. Her responsiveness did not exclude further instruction. Rather it tacitly implied the need for it, Acts 16:15. The task, then, is still before us. The job is not finished. May we be faithful in all seasons to teach His word, II Timothy 4:2.

*Lord, Your Son is widely known. Your Spirit is busy. May I do my part to spread the Good News among the nations. In the name of Jesus, who sent the Holy Spirit, Amen.*
Though confined in prison, Paul continued to proclaim the Gospel, Philippians 1:12. Soldiers were assigned to guard him, Acts 28:16. Therefore, the Good News spread “throughout the whole palace guard,” Philippians 1:13. The opportunity for Paul to witness on behalf of Christ encouraged other believers to do the same (outside of the prison). They spoke with fearless courage, Philippians 1:14.

Sadly, not all of the preaching was properly motivated. Some spoke out of “good will,” Philippians 1:16. Others were moved by “selfish ambition,” Philippians 1:17. Apparently, the latter group was theologically orthodox. For the apostle rejoiced that Christ was preached by them, Philippians 1:18.

- **Selfish ambition then.** A person with “selfish ambition” did things for personal advancement, Philippians 2:21. In the first century, the term described a politician who did whatever it took to gain public office. Such was the epitome of a “self seeking” manipulator, Romans 2:8. The pretense of these self centered preachers was wrong. The apostle tolerated their error because Christ was being made known. Though he felt the sting of their malicious intent, the apostle put the Lord above the “trouble” they caused him, Philippians 1:17.

- **Selfish ambition now.** Everyone is influenced by interests, shaped by motives. Church leaders can use their power to push their opinions on others. Church members can use pressure to get their way. “Selfish ambition” is part of the “sinful nature” of human beings, Galatians 5:19,20. Thankfully, in spite of these warts and wrinkles, “Christ is preached.” That does not justify the push and shove of Church politics. It merely gives hope to the faithful in times of discouraging discord.

   “The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached,” Philippians 1:18.

Paul was not glad that good men gave way to lesser motives—to “envy and rivalry,” Philippians 1:15. He was happy that Christ was proclaimed. He knew the Lord could bless the message—though imperfectly delivered—to save the lost.

Let the message be heard. The convert belongs to Christ. God is able to use less than perfect messengers to lead a penitent seeker to salvation, II Corinthians 4:7. Certainly it is bad business to serve Jesus with devilish motives. Though not good, good may come from it. Purge, then, the lesser reasons for sharing the Good News. Serve Him in sincerity, II Corinthians 1:12. God deserves our best.

Lord, I struggle with the sin of self promotion. I want to be genuine—untainted with selfish ambition. Your cause is worthy of nothing less. In Him, who was without guile, Amen.

King Saul was trying to capture David, I Samuel 23:7,8. David “kept moving from place to place,” I Samuel 23:13. The life of a fugitive is insecure, lonely, and stressful. It saps the strength of him who is on-the-run. It caused David to question the purposes of heaven.


In a moment of weakness, David was made strong. The same expression was used in reference to battle, I Kings 20:23. The word was often translated to “help,” II Chronicles 29:34, or “assist,” Ezra 1:6. Jonathan encouraged David to lean on God. David did. Therefore, in his moment of dire need, David wrote:

“Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me,” Psalms 54:4.

Jonathan showed true friendship. He came to David in spite of considerable risk. In the day of distress, Jonathan reminded David of his relationship with God. His encouragement did not consist of trite cliques. It focused on the promise of the Lord:

“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you,” Deuteronomy 31:6,8.

In the hour of despair, when doubt confronted his faith, David was refreshed by the advice of a godly friend, Proverbs 17:17. Jonathan troubled himself to find David. This brought great joy. Yet Jonathan did more. He animated the trust of his friend by pointing to the providence of God. Years later, when the distress had long past, David remembered the kind gesture of Jonathan, II Samuel 9:1.

- **Opportune moment.** Jonathan came at a timely hour. David was upset. “Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life,” Psalms 142:4. Without Jonathan, that seemed true. Without God, that was quite real. But Jonathan was there. God was by his side. David, in spite of all appearances, was surrounded by his nearest and dearest friends.

- **Appropriate word.** “As iron sharpens iron,” Proverbs 27:17, so Jonathan sharpened the faith of David. His friend reminded him of the plans of heaven. God was not finished with David. “You will be king over Israel,” Jonathan insisted, I Samuel 23:17. Why, then, fear Saul? These were bracing words. Next to the counsel of God, the encouragement of a friend is the most powerful help in a time of crisis.

  Lord God, everyone has moments of despair. When life closes in on me, send a friend. When life closes in on someone else, send me. In Jesus, the greatest friend of all, Amen.
"You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence," James 5:5.

Some truths are uncomfortable. This is one of them. The passage speaks of judgment against those who cheat the poor, Isaiah 3:13-15; Jeremiah 5:26; Micah 6:10,11. The message angers the guilty: “You hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth,” Amos 5:10.

James addresses the wealthy. It was not riches per se but the selfish accumulation of riches that was called into question, I Timothy 6:9,10. A godless presumption that ignores the coming judgment will lead to inescapable misery, James 5:1.

“Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain...You have plotted the ruin of many people, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life,” Habakkuk 2:9,10.

No one can tell whether a person is rich or poor by examining his bank account. The answer is found in his heart. True wealth is based on what one is (not what one has). Those with full wallets and empty hearts commit three errors.

- **They hoard possessions**, James 5:2,3. In biblical times, wealth consisted of material goods, expensive cloths, and precious metals. When these things were kept for personal use, they “rotted” and “corroded,” Matthew 6:19,20. They testified against the selfish abusers of wealth. Instead of laying up treasures in heaven, the greedy were “storing up wrath” against themselves, Romans 2:5. The passage is a wakeup call. “The last days” are here, Hebrews 9:26; I Peter 1:5,20; I John 2:18.

- **They withhold wages**, James 5:4. The Lord requires a prompt payment of wages earned, Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:15; Malachi 3:5. God does not tolerate getting rich at the expense of the poor. Those who “defraud laborers” are condemned for their “unrighteousness and injustice,” Jeremiah 22:13. The Lord Almighty knows.

- **They enjoy luxury**, James 5:5. A lifestyle of “self-indulgence” is like cattle eating their way to the butcher shop. The inhabitants of ancient Sodom partied in prosperity while their neighbors languished in poverty, Ezekiel 16:49. The rich man “lived in luxury every day” while ignoring the poor man at his gate, Luke 16:19-21.

The elite are prone to oppress the poor, Amos 2:6,7. They plot against those who are innocent, who cannot resist their devious schemes, James 5:6. Wealth has always been a cruel master (though few of the wealthy recognize the danger). Everyone should pray for deliverance from the sin of greed. The consequences of self-indulgence are certain. Therefore, take note. Beware! The day of judgment is coming.

*You give me good things, Lord, but I take more than I need. Turn my taking into giving so that those who have not may have enough. In Christ, who became poor so I could be rich, Amen.*
May 22

“He does not willingly bring affliction,” Lamentations 3:33.

Jerusalem was in shambles. God caused the disaster. He made His prophet “dwell in darkness,” walled him in so he “could not escape,” Lamentations 3:6,7. He made Jeremiah a target of His arrows, filled him with bitterness, and trampled him in the dust, Lamentations 3:12,15,16.


If God is responsible for all that misery, to whom should the survivors of the disaster turn? Surprisingly, the answer was the Lord—the very One who caused their suffering. How could that be? How could any sane person turn to Him who had caused them so much pain? The answer has three parts.

• **Character of God.** Regardless of external circumstances, hope resides in Jehovah. Because of His “great love,” the survivors were still alive, Lamentations 3:22. He did not abandon His people. The Lord is merciful. He is “gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love and faithfulness,” Exodus 34:6. God is the “portion” or inheritance of those who trust in Him, Lamentations 3:24. Though they may have nothing on earth, they will have all they need from heaven, Psalms 73:25,26.

• **Faith for survival.** Amidst the rubble of a ruined city, the survivors waited for an answer, Lamentations 3:26; cf. Isaiah 40:29-31. Waiting is not necessarily pleasant. Still those who wait look forward to the unfolding of His purpose. The survivors have no answer but they know who does. They are convinced He is in control. Faith hunkers down in silent hope, Lamentations 3:28,29. This is not a resignation of defeat but a triumph of trust in the sovereign Lord.

• **Heartache in heaven.** It is true. God “brings grief,” Lamentations 3:31,32. He does not do so “willingly,” Lamentations 3:33. That is foreign to His nature. It pains Him to see His children in tears. He is aware of the suffering of the innocent, the denial of human rights, the injustice of the courts, Lamentations 3:34-36. He sees the unfairness. He hurts over those who hurt. His pain gives hope to the hurting. What transpires in life is decreed by God. It is His world. What happens, then, is not an unfortunate mistake. Why should His creatures complain? Lamentations 3:37-39.

The wrath of God does not nullify the love of God. He punishes sin. His judgments are severe. They are designed to bring repentance, Lamentations 3:40. God afflicts for a purpose (otherwise there is no need for affliction). He allows pain so that He can offer mercy. His afflictions are His compassion wrapped in bandages, Lamentations 3:25.

“Concluding that God had called,” Acts 16:10.

The apostle Paul was prevented from going to eastern and northern Turkey, Acts 16:6,7. So he went to Greece, Acts 16:8-10. The Lord intervened. He overruled the good intentions of a capable man. Like Job, Paul listened.

“You will call and I will answer,” Job 14:15.

The actions of the apostle were framed by the guidance of God. At crucial junctures in his life, Paul responded to “revelation” from above, Galatians 2:1,2. He was sensitive to the leading of God from the very start of his ministry, Acts 9:3-9; 13:1-3. He maintained that sensitivity throughout his career, Acts 22:17-21; 23:11.

Divine guidance takes different forms. Sometimes the Holy Spirit is front and center. Sometimes a human agent acts as a direction giver. On this occasion, the apostle concluded “that God had called” him, Acts 16:10. His calling contained several important features.

- **It required human decisions.** The call of heaven is a take-it or leave-it offer. It does not force human compliance. It invites, Matthew 22:4; John 2:2; I Corinthians 10:27. It encourages a positive response, Matthew 4:21. The “called” are those who decide to follow God with a willing heart, Hebrews 9:15.

- **It included temporary setbacks.** The call of God does not preclude suffering. Within days after receiving his call, Paul was beaten and imprisoned, Acts 16:22-24. Shortly thereafter he was run out of town, Acts 17:5,10. And, a bit later, he was falsely accused in court, Acts 18:12,13. Nevertheless, the scripture says, “If you suffer for doing good…this is commendable.” To such we are called, I Peter 2:20,21.

- **It involved many unknowns.** The calling of God is not always clear. Why was Paul forbidden to enter Asia? Why was he guided toward Europe? At the time of the guidance, it did not make sense. Later, in hindsight, it was clearer. God is “faithful,” I Corinthians 1:9. Guidance is like reading a book. The conclusion comes at the end.

When we are convinced there is a divine purpose to which we respond, it is possible in time to see His leading. The manner of guidance may vary. The fact that He guides remains unchanged. We are called “to live in peace,” I Corinthians 7:15, “to be free,” Galatians 5:13, and “to live a holy life,” I Thessalonians 4:7. We are called “into His kingdom,” I Thessalonians 2:11,12, invited to “take hold of eternal life,” I Timothy 6:12, and beckoned “into His wonderful light,” I Peter 2:9. God is calling. The surrendered heart—open to the delicate promptings of heaven—will respond. The grace of guidance is a gift to every saint.

**Gracious Lord, renew Your calling every day. I am listening. I want to respond. Show me the way. Through Him, who leads me, Amen.**
“You may ask anything,” John 14:14.

Philip asked the Lord to “show him the Father,” John 14:8. His request went against the grain of common sense. Did not Philip understand? For the Lord had said,

“No one may see Me and live,” Exodus 33:20.

Nevertheless, Jesus responded. “Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father,” John 14:9. And, in order to amplify His statement, the Lord affirmed that He was in the Father and the Father was in Him, John 14:10,11. Then He made two startling promises.

• Believers would do greater things than Jesus, John 14:12. The Lord is greater than Moses, Hebrews 3:3. He is greater than the prophets. He is more broadly known and more highly esteemed than any human. Yet He was confined to “the lost sheep of Israel,” Matthew 15:24. He did not preach in Europe, go to South America, step foot in Asia, or enter Africa. The “greater things” were left to those who believe in Him. The “greater things” would happen “because” He went to the Father, John 14:12. While in the flesh, He was limited to Palestine. The Spirit, who would replace Him, was free to go anywhere, John 14:16. The “greater things” pointed to the explosive expansion of the kingdom.

• Jesus would answer the prayer of believers, John 14:13. Many people have tripped and fallen over this saying. The promise is so big, so sweeping, and so emphatic. It boggles the mind. But, in real life, the actual results of prayer seem meager. The saints have been lead to expect much, Matthew 7:7,8. They are disappointed in receiving little. The danger is in dumbing down the promise. The difficulty is in misreading what He said. Jesus promised to answer certain kinds of prayers. Specifically, He said, we must utter all petitions in “His name,” John 14:13. The test of any prayer is asking “according to His will,” I John 5:14. Does that not eliminate all selfish requests—all prayers of revenge, ambition, and pride? A prayer must “bring glory to the Father,” John 14:13. Only prayers that further His purposes will be answered. Any other petition is a mockery of the spirit of worship, Matthew 6:5,6.

Human existence seems so insignificant. Little is attempted. Less is accomplished. Eventually all ends in the grave, Ecclesiastes 9:10. What is done appears to make little difference. And, after the funeral, life goes on. Someone else fills the empty space. The dead are forgotten—easily replaced, hardly missed, barely remembered. In a depressing world, the promises of Jesus are a breath of fresh air. And undoubtedly one of His greatest promises was to give us “anything” we ask in His name, according to His will, John 14:14.

I cling to Your promises. They offer me hope. They give me value. May I be worthy of Your trust. In confidence, I wait for Your help to do “greater things.” In Jesus, who answers prayer, Amen.
The cry of an infant is soothed by its mother. She whispers quietly. “Shhhhhh!” Her voice is gentle and reassuring. “Mommy is here.” The sobs slowly turn to smiles. The tender touch and soft embrace calm a disturbed heart. The child feels the rhythmic motion of the rocking, the happy notes of a familiar lullaby. All is well again.

God is pictured as a loving mother cradling a troubled baby, Zephaniah 3:17. Paul made a similar analogy. “We were gentle among you like a mother caring for her little children,” he wrote, I Thessalonians 2:7. Such gentleness is a common description of God toward His people, Isaiah 40:11, of a missionary toward a young Church, II Corinthians 10:1, of a minister toward the members of his congregation, I Timothy 5:1,2.

• **A stubborn child.** Why was Israel upset? God charged her with open rebellion, gross corruption, and heartless betrayal, Zephaniah 3:1,2. The civil authorities, false prophets, and temple priests lead the people astray, Zephaniah 3:3,4. God had leveled these accusations against Israel in the past, Isaiah 56:10-12; Jeremiah 7:27,28. He would do so again in the future, Ezekiel 22:23-29. The Lord does not tolerate sin, Zephaniah 3:5.

• **A loving parent.** God is not an indulgent parent. He does not look the other way, Zephaniah 3:6. He hoped Israel would accept correction. They refused. “They were still eager to act corruptly in all they did,” Zephaniah 3:7. As the parent of a wayward child, God had exhausted His patience. The day of reckoning had come, Zephaniah 3:8.

When the smoke cleared and the dust settled, the compassion of God replaced the wrath of God, Zephaniah 3:14,15; cf. Lamentations 3:19-24. The hand that administered the discipline became the hand that comforted the downcast. The angry parent became the consoling parent. There was nothing to fear, Zephaniah 3:16. All was well again.

The Lord scooped up Israel into His arms. He calmed her in the day of trouble. He promised to be with her, to rescue her, Zephaniah 3:17a. He applied the bandage. He kissed the wound. Jehovah reassured His distraught child.

“No harm will befall you, no disaster will come near you,” Psalms 91:10.

God comforted Israel. He reassures us, II Thessalonians 3:3; I Peter 3:13. God delights in His spiritual offspring. He soothes their upset hearts. He sings lullabies in times of need. How rapturous is the voice of divine love, the music of reconciliation! It prompts and sustains our joy in the Lord. “We love because He first loved us,” I John 4:19. Indeed, all is well again.

*Holy Father, when things go wrong, when life turns sour, draw me into Your arms. Hold me close and whisper reassuring promises in my ear. Let me feel Your heart and hear Your voice. I need the quiet consolation of Your love. In Christ, Amen.*
“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders,” Colossians 4:5.

The believer is on display. The world is watching. Therefore, the behavior of a Christian assumes an enormous importance, Matthew 10:16; I Corinthians 10:32,33; II Corinthians 4:2; Ephesians 4:29; I Thessalonians 4:11,12; I Peter 2:12. It supports or sabotages the faith, draws in or drives away potential converts.

Every believer shares the Gospel. Whether active or passive in proclamation, Christians have an influence. They are the Bible to non-Christians, II Corinthians 3:2. If the faith is not attractive, the world will remain unmoved. In order to avoid slamming the door of belief, three imperatives are given to every follower of Christ.

- **Make proper use of each occasion.** Colossians 4:5b; cf. Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 5:15,16. The believer is to be tactful. He must know when to speak and when to be silent. The believer must not be condescending, judgmental, or combative. Few people are ever argued into faith. Seize the moment when it comes—the chance encounter, the unexpected question, the unplanned incident that offers an opportunity for wise and effective witness.

- **Employ tasteful forms of speech.** Colossians 4:6a. The lips of the saints are “anointed with grace,” Psalms 45:2. They exude a pleasantness that attracts the hearer. Converts are made after friendships are formed. Hence, the words of a believer should always be “full of grace” and “seasoned with salt.” This describes conversation that has a pleasing flavor and a preserving quality, Mark 9:50.

- **Address the needs of each person.** Colossians 4:6b. Christians must be people oriented. They must know the hearer, respect him as a person of worth, and speak to his needs. Insipid generalities are futile. Common clichés are useless. There are no stock answers. “Everyone” deserves a response suited to his condition, I Peter 3:15. Rapport is gained. Trust is earned. Interest is secured. The faith is heard because the faith is seen.

“A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver,” Proverbs 25:11.

Nowhere is heavenly wisdom more required. Nowhere is it of greater advantage than in leading the lost to Christ. A cue can be taken from the “sons of this world” who deal wisely with their own, Luke 16:8. The wisdom from above is “pure, then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere,” James 3:17. The wise Christian is insightful, well-informed, and practical. Indeed, the calm spirit, gentle demeanor, and fair judgment of the believer gives him a leg up in winning the world. This is the way it ought to be, I Timothy 4:8.

Father, show the way. Give me wisdom in conversation with others. May I make the Gospel attractive by speaking the truth in love. Through my gentle Savior, Amen.

God is love. Yet He gets angry. Is that a contradiction? How should His wrath be understood? What causes a loving God to be furious with His creation? The Lord is “provoked” by sin, 1 Kings 15:30. His vexation is intense. His wrath burns “like fire,” Jeremiah 4:4. It overwhelms like a “flood of water,” Hosea 5:10. His indignation against sin is called “the fury of His wrath,” Revelation 16:19.

WICKEDNESS ALWAYS INFURIATES GOD.

The rage of heaven is strong. It arises when something is said or done to violate His relationship with earth, Deuteronomy 9:7,8. His anger is described as a devouring, a slaughter, a punishment, Isaiah 13:9; Ezekiel 5:14,15; Daniel 9:16; Malachi 1:4. The language is vivid. His anger is as real as His love. His wrath must not be taken lightly. It is not merely poetic imagery.

The love and anger of God is pictured as the contents of a cup. The Lord gives a cup to everyone to drink, Psalms 16:5. For those who obey His will, He gives the “cup of salvation,” Psalms 116:13. To those who ignore Him, He gives the “cup of wrath,” Isaiah 51:22. His cup is to be drained “to the dregs,” Isaiah 51:17; cf. Psalms 75:8.

• Cause of His anger. Jehovah does not have temper tantrums. His anger is a just response to human failure. His wrath is poured out when He is not trusted, Exodus 4:14, when His people complain, Numbers 11:1,33; 12:9. His anger is riled when He is replaced with idols, Deuteronomy 11:16,17, when He is disobeyed, Colossians 3:5,6.

• Nature of His wrath. Divine anger is a positive thing. It is an instrument of rebuke and correction, Hebrews 12:4-11. His anger is provoked by “wicked deeds,” Psalms 106:29. It “restrains” those who survive its fury, Psalms 76:10. Though contrary to initial impressions, the wrath of God is benevolent—an ultimate benefit to those who drink the cup of His anger.

Wrath is not a primary characteristic of God. Rather, He shows restraint when He is angry, Psalms 78:38. And His anger is “set aside” when He forgives, Psalms 85:2,3. In other words, His wrath is momentary, but His grace lasts a “lifetime,” Psalms 30:5.

The anger of God is part of the nature of God. Unlike us, He abhors sin in all its forms. He opposes the wicked without prejudice. He loves the righteous without limits. He only intends good toward humankind. When it is necessary for Him to act in anger, His good intentions are not forgotten, 1 Thessalonians 5:9.

Lord, my sin deserves Your contempt. You have purer eyes than to look on evil. Your love is a refuge. Your wrath is a warning. Thanks for Your concern. In the unfailing arms of Jesus, Amen.
“Men have gone in search of many schemes,” Ecclesiastes 7:29.

The writer of Ecclesiastes devoted himself to finding out “all that is done under heaven.” He gave himself to the study and exploration of wisdom, Ecclesiastes 1:13. In particular, he wanted “to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly,” Ecclesiastes 7:25. It all seemed so meaningless, Ecclesiastes 1:14.

He proceeded in his quest with calm resolve. He applied himself to the task but came up empty, Ecclesiastes 1:16,17. Though “adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things,” he found nothing, Ecclesiastes 7:27,28a. The treasure of wisdom which could unlock the secret of life proved elusive, Ecclesiastes 7:23; cf. Job 28:12-21.

- **Man knew better.** God knew where wisdom was, Job 28:23,24. And He revealed its whereabouts to man. “The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding,” Job 28:28; cf. Proverbs 1:7a; 9:10. Man had been informed, Romans 1:21.

- **God did better.** There was no use blaming God. The Lord “made mankind upright,” Ecclesiastes 7:29a. Immediately after creation, God examined what He had made. “It was very good,” Genesis 1:31a. Nevertheless, something went terribly wrong. Few people are righteous. Few of them care to be righteous, Ecclesiastes 7:28b. Human nature has been corrupted. “The heart is deceitful above all things,” Jeremiah 17:9. When people want to do good, evil is right there to checkmate their best intentions, Romans 7:21.

Man is frustratingly devious. What they want to do, they fail to get done. What they do not want to do, they end up doing anyway. The apostle Paul, speaking of himself, said,

“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do...I know that nothing good lives in me...For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not wish to do—this I keep doing,” Romans 7:15-19.

What is the problem? The human race has “gone in search of many schemes,” Ecclesiastes 7:29. The term “schemes” implies a talent or skillfulness for making things, Exodus 35:30-33; cf. II Chronicles 26:15. The word can refer to “thoughts” or “plans” or “inventions” that lead away from the path of righteousness, Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 18:12. Humans go to a lot of trouble to bring trouble on themselves!

It is certain that we are not what God made us to be. We have digressed from the original design of the Creator. Though ingenious inventors, we have made a mess of our pristine purity. We need look no further than ourselves. It is our fault. God is not to blame.

*Father, I have created my own misery. My scheming is the problem. A respect for You is the solution. Help me find the path for recovery and walk therein. Thank You for Your patience. In Christ Jesus, my wisdom, Amen.*
“Be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves,” Matthew 10:16.

Jesus sent His twelve disciples out into the world. He carefully instructed them, Matthew 10:5-15. The task before them was far from easy. They needed to be prepared for the worst so that they could accomplish the best.

The Lord was honest. He spoke frankly. He commissioned His followers to accept a grim assignment. And, remarkably, it captured their attention, motivated their obedience. In effect, He warned that opposition would greet them at every turn. Government officials would arrest them. Religious leaders would flog them. Family members would betray them. They were headed (while on earth) toward a less than inviting future.

- **The present trouble.** It was a common belief that in the last days friends would be disloyal to friends, family would turn against family, Matthew 10:21. Though unsettling, the caution of Christ confirmed the approach of the final epic in history. His words were riveting. They electrified the imagination of the disciples—braced them for their mission.

- **The needed courage.** The apostles did not waver. God guided them in times of distress, Matthew 10:19,20; cf. Exodus 4:12. In the final analysis, success did not rely on their skillfulness but on their surrender. The world needed to be on alert. When the disciples came, things would not be the same, Acts 17:6.

Persecution did not hinder the progress of the Gospel. It actually promoted it—giving opportunity to witness in otherwise inaccessible places, Matthew 10:18. Those who remained faithful to the end would be saved, Matthew 10:22. The Lord was with them.

Jesus sent His sheep out among wolves. A rather insane idea! From a human point of view, the apostles did not have much chance of surviving, Ezekiel 22:27; Zephaniah 3:3. The sheep were harmless. The wolves were vicious. Doom waited—or so it seemed.

Still the Lord instructed His messengers to be “as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves,” Matthew 10:16. Quite a combination! A snake is cunning, Genesis 3:1; II Corinthians 11:3. A dove is defenseless, Psalms 74:19. The disciples had to walk a fine line between subtle cleverness and blind naiveté.

“The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways,” Proverbs 14:8.


*Father of heaven and earth, Your assignment is clear. The outcome is guaranteed. Though bumpy, the road ahead is secure. With wise gentleness, I proceed in the footsteps of Your Son. Through Him, Amen.*
Jehovah is a unique God. He is without equal, without comparison. He is like-no-other. God is above all gods. He is the God of gods. There is no God like Him, I Samuel 2:2.

Where did such exalted claims originate? The matchless character of God is deducted from His mighty deeds in history, Deuteronomy 4:32-34. The Christian faith is different from other religions because its God is different from other gods.

- **“There is no one like the Lord.”** Exodus 8:10. Yahweh is without parallel. None of the gods are His peer. He has no rival. In comparing Himself to other gods, Jehovah said, “There is no one like Me in all the earth,” Exodus 9:14. Beyond a doubt “there is no one like the God of Jeshurun,” Deuteronomy 33:26. The words “no one like” suggest unmatched, one-of-a-kindness, Exodus 9:18, 24; 10:14; 11:6; Deuteronomy 34:10. As a particular linguistic form, “no one like” simply states that there is no other god on a par with, equivalent to, or on the level of Yahweh.

- **“Who among the gods is like You?”** Exodus 15:11. The sovereign Lord is exclusive among the deities of the world. Moses asked, “what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do the mighty deeds You do?” Deuteronomy 3:24. He does not act like any of the other gods. There is simply no other god like Him, none approaching His majestic greatness. He is magnificent in holiness, awesome in power, and extraordinary in accomplishment. Hence, Israel is without equal among the nations because her God is without equal among the gods, Deuteronomy 4:7; 5:26; 33:29. The conviction could not be stated more clearly. The anticipated answer to these “who is like” questions is always “no one.” When they refer to the Lord, the expected reply is “none but Jehovah.”

He is big enough to be everywhere and small enough to be anywhere!

The ancient world believed in numerous deities. These gods and goddesses lived in their own realm above. They had no concern for human creatures below. Jehovah was different. He intervened in the affairs of Israel. His interaction was the foundation of her knowledge about the Lord, Deuteronomy 4:35.

The distinctive greatness of Yahweh was neither a philosophical deduction nor a cultural adaptation. The unrivaled superiority of God emerged from the crucible of experience with the Lord, Deuteronomy 4:36-38. In light of His redeeming power, Israel could confidently say that there is no God but God, Deuteronomy 32:39. “There is no other,” Deuteronomy 4:39. Therefore, accepting His unassailable uniqueness is the rationale for keeping His uncompromising commandments, Deuteronomy 4:40.

Your glory is beyond comprehension. Your greatness is beyond measurement. There is no other. You are the only one—my God and my Redeemer, Amen.
“Be merciful to those who doubt, snatch others from the fire and save them,” Jude 22,23.

These words were addressed to a Church under attack, Jude 1. False teachers had “secretly slipped” in among them. The deceivers were dangerous. Their doctrine was heresy, Jude 4. The pretenders promised what they could not deliver, Jude 12. They promoted their enterprise by boasting about themselves. They flattered others “for their own advantage,” Jude 16.

Still there was no need to panic. An influx of Church predators had been predicted, Jude 17,18. The faithful were told to brace themselves, pray, and remain centered in the love of God. Jude 20,21. In addition, they were responsible to expose the evildoers.

The believers must confront such men—not to destroy but to save. In short, they should “be merciful,” Jude 22a. Mercy is compassion given to those who need it, Matthew 18:27. For Jude, it was turning bad men into good men. If the courage to rescue the lost dies, the Church ceases to be the people of God. Three groups needed mercy.

• **Those flirting with falsehood.** They were attracted by error, confused, on the verge of capitulating. They had not made the final decision. Their questions needed answers lest they fell into deeper darkness, I Peter 3:15.

• **Those caught by deception.** Others had made a commitment, had started down the wrong path. They should be stopped, snatched from the fire, Jude 23a.

• **Those overwhelmed in sin.** These had taken the plunge, had immersed themselves in evil. They were like the polluted garments of lepers, Jude 23b. Like all the others, they too deserved mercy, James 5:20.

Christians must not be concerned exclusively with their own salvation. They must reach out to the misguided and the mistaken. They are, after all, their “brother’s keeper,” Genesis 4:9. If the faithful neglect the unfaithful, who will restore them?

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy,” Matthew 5:7.

Disciples of Jesus must rescue sinners, II Corinthians 5:10; I Timothy 4:16. It must be done with care. Efforts to save the lost are fraught with risks. The ground is slippery upon which the sinner stands. Wisdom is required. We must love the sinner but hate his sin, Romans 12:9; Ephesians 5:11; I Thessalonians 5:21,22. Those who save the lost “will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work,” II Timothy 2:21.

Lord, when deceivers come, I tend to go. Hiding will not help them. Give me courage to lovingly confront the wayward. In Him, who is merciful, Amen.
“How long must this go on?” Habakkuk 2:6.

Terrorists were on the loose. They were creating mayhem, Habakkuk 1:6,7. The world was in disarray. The tyrants did not care, Habakkuk 1:10,11. The prophet was perplexed. God had done nothing, Habakkuk 1:2.

The injustice was difficult to fathom. For believers, it was a challenging moment. The assurance of the soul was shattered. Human explanations failed. Faith became problematic. How could God tolerate such evil? Habakkuk 1:13.

When saints stand at a tipping point, they wait for the Lord to answer, Habakkuk 2:1. They hold tightly to the ancient axiom: “a man reaps what he sows,” Galatians 6:7.

Those who hurt others do harm to themselves, Habakkuk, 2:7,8. Life is a boomerang, Isaiah 33:1; cf. Matthew 7:2. “As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head,” Obadiah 15b. There are many philosophies of life but only one that leads to life.

“Do to others what you would have them do to you,” Matthew 7:12.

The prophet was at a critical juncture. He staggered at the prospect of continual cruelty. How long, he sighed, will the interminable plundering of ruthless men go on? They seem to do their mischief with impunity, Habakkuk 2:6. Does God care?

- **Their injustice.** Acquisition of things by violence, robbery, or guile is theft. What is taken will be taken away. The thief is fattening himself for the “day of slaughter,” James 5:4-6. He is never satisfied, Ecclesiastes 5:10. He who determines to enrich himself at the expense of others seldom knows when to stop. “In the end he will prove to be a fool,” Jeremiah 17:11.

- **Their judgment.** Punishment is inevitable. They have “forfeited” their life, Habakkuk 2:9,10. The plunderer will surely be plundered, Proverbs 1:18,19. He will eventually sink into a cheerless grave, Psalms 49:12-14. He will lie down and be no more. Terrors will overtake him like a flood. The tempest will snatch him away in the night, Job 27:19-23. The boomerang will return!

In the eye of the storm, the believer is assured that punishment awaits the tyrant. The Lord has spoken. What He says will prove true. It may linger but it will not delay forever, Habakkuk 2:3. The righteous survive. They are faithful, Habakkuk 2:4. They know that, if they do not stand firm in the faith, they will not stand at all, Isaiah 7:9b. Hence, in spite of threatening circumstances, they “rejoice in the Lord,” Habakkuk 3:17,18.

*Father above, life below can be puzzling. The wicked rob the righteous. It is not fair. May I not doubt Your justice but wait for Your faithfulness. In Him, Amen.*
**June 2**

“Keep your spiritual fervor,” Romans 12:11.

This text is couched within a series of ethical demands, Romans 12:9-13. It is an encouragement to maintain our Christian zeal. Paul said that the believer should live with intensity—with a red hot passion for serving the Lord.

The word “fervor” means to “well up” like fermenting wine, Job 32:18, 19. It refers to a pot of boiling water, to the fiery eloquence of a gifted speaker, Ezekiel 24:3-5; Acts 18:25. It is manifested by giving oneself “fully to the work of the Lord,” I Corinthians 15:58.

“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor,” Romans 12:11.

Saints are diligent. Some are even fanatical—consumed with enthusiasm. Jesus was suspected of “being out of His mind,” Mark 3:20, 21. So was Paul, Acts 26:24. We, too, are to be “insanely” committed.

There is no place for lethargy, no room for sluggishness. A believer is engaged in a serious struggle against evil, Ephesians 6:12. We are expected to be on fire, eager at all times to do what is good, Titus 2:14; cf. Ecclesiastes 9:10.

Religion should shape life. Christianity is a living power. It should take possession of the heart, govern the mind, and propel the will. It is in this light that Paul describes spiritual fervor.

- **Life of obedience.** The believer is focused. His life has purpose and direction. If the disciple does not serve, he is not a disciple. If a slave does not obey, he is not a slave, Romans 6:16. The Christian life is service rendered to Jesus Christ. If we call Him Teacher and Lord, should we not gladly do what he says? John 13:13.

- **Performed with diligence.** Temptations toward indolence are common. Some Church members are naturally inclined to inaction. Others get discouraged. They feel there is little use. However, the motivation for persistence is Christ. Who can do too much for Him who did so much for us?

Life in Christ is not characterized by on-again off-again fidelity. The believer must not be controlled by the dictates of mood and circumstance. His devotion is neither haphazard nor irregular. He has an unflagging earnestness. Whatever he does, he does “for the glory of God,” I Corinthians 10:31. He refuses to be at the mercy of his changing emotions, erratic feelings, and unpredictable sentiments. As a conscientious believer, he serves the Lord with gusto, Colossians 3:23, 24. The saints keep their spiritual fervor!

*Sovereign God, You have the right to require my utmost. No devotion is too great. No effort is too strenuous. No sacrifice is too much. You demand my all because You gave Your all. Through Christ, the One I serve, Amen.*
June 3

“You do well to send them on their way,” III John 6.

Gaius is complimented. It was not his public service, scholarly work, or political position that is mentioned. Instead, it is his unpretending act of quiet thoughtfulness.

People often neglect the inconspicuous deed. They think it is necessary to demonstrate their piety in more ambitious ways. There is no better proof of kindness—toward those who have no claim on our generosity—than giving to those in need, Matthew 10:40-42.

In the missionary enterprise, saints should either go, let go, or help go.

- **Christian obligation.** Gaius gave travel assistance to some fellow believers (though they were “strangers” to him), III John 5. These itinerant preachers had mentioned his goodness while visiting John, III John 3. So the venerable apostle asks Gaius for another favor. “Send them on their way” in a manner that God would approve, III John 6. These traveling evangelists were worthy of such help because “it was for the sake of the Name that they went out,” III John 7. Christians have an obligation to underwrite the work of those who minister the word, I Corinthians 9:7-12a.

- **Missionary policy.** Jesus taught that “the worker was worth his keep,” Matthew 10:10. Paul said, “those who preach the Gospel should receive their living from the Gospel,” I Corinthians 9:13,14. Nevertheless, there are cases in which it is expedient to bypass this principle. The Good News should be announced free-of-charge to those who have not accepted it. They should not be expected to support it before they embrace it. Hence, the early missionaries were careful to refrain from hindering the spread of the word. They took nothing from unbelievers, III John 7b. Otherwise, they might be suspected of a mercenary motive. “They put up with anything rather than hinder the Gospel of Christ,” I Corinthians 9:12b.

Gaius was asked to “send them on their way,” III John 6. This was more than a friendly goodbye. It involved providing travel expenses, Acts 15:1-3; Romans 15:23,24. Since Churches were few and far between, sending evangelists required substantial generosity.

Such “hospitality” was a sacred duty, III John 8. Christians are to “share with God’s people who are in need.” They are to “practice hospitality,” Romans 12:13; cf. Hebrews 13:2; I Peter 4:9. Circumstances preclude many from being a missionary. Life requires that they stay at home. Where they cannot go, their money can go. Though behind-the-scenes, they are essential partners in the cause, III John 8. Those who hold the rope at home are as necessary as those who are held by the rope on the field.

*Thank You, Lord, for missionaries. Thank You for generous hearts who support missionaries. It is Your will they go. It is Your will that others help them go. May I recognize my place and do my part as a partner of the truth. By faith, I pray through Christ Jesus, May it be so.*
June 4

“I was ashamed to ask,” Ezra 8:22.

Ezra was getting ready to lead the exiles back to Jerusalem. He proclaimed a fast (a common practice in times of peril, II Chronicles 20:1-3; Jeremiah 36:9. He prayed for safe transit along the dangerous highways that lie ahead, Ezra 8:21. A caravan laden with valuable goods was easy prey for the bandits who haunted the route, Ezra 8:24-27.

Ezra expressed a deep trust in the Lord to supply a safe passage, Psalms 20:7. He declined the protection of the king. He felt ashamed to ask, Ezra 8:22.

The primary meaning of “ashamed” is “to fall into disgrace,“ Jeremiah 22:22; Micah 1:11. The word expresses a sense of embarrassment or dismay, Job 6:19,20. Confusion and humiliation are involved, Isaiah 1:29,30; 30:5; Jeremiah 9:19. Ezra did not want to act like he doubted the One in whom he had placed his trust.

Ezra took his faith seriously. The decision to trust God exclusively was a brave gesture. To say a person lives by faith, requires faithful living. His reliance on God was fully exonerated, Ezra 8:31,32. The Lord honored his trust.

Faith plus faithfulness overcomes.

A believer need not live in fear. He should not doubt the promises of heaven, Deuteronomy 31:6. Ezra believed the words of God. He refused to act otherwise. He displayed an exemplary courage and a commendable caution

- **Exemplary courage.** The way home was long and treacherous. The company of pilgrims included “children,” Ezra 8:21. The impending trip was like sending out lambs among wolves, cf. Luke 10:3. Ezra believed the King of kings could offer more protection than the king of Persia, Psalms 46:1-3; Romans 8:31. God promised to keep His people, II Chronicles 16:9a. Ezra trusted the Lord, Ezra 8:23.

- **Commendable caution.** Caution is not cowardice. Ezra was careful with the treasures entrusted to him, Ezra 7:15,16. These precious items were “consecrated to the Lord,” Ezra 8:28. As a caretaker of sacred possessions, Ezra was determined to be “faithful,” I Corinthians 4:2. Accordingly, Ezra put the valued articles in the hands of competent men, Ezra 8:24,25. By so doing, he avoided any occasion of criticism, any accusations of misappropriating funds, II Corinthians 8:19-21.

Ezra was faithful in the sight of God and man. He kept his eyes on the One who watched over him. He proceeded with appropriate valor and vigilance.

_Holy God, my safe arrival in heaven will be proof that Your good hand was upon me. Until I experience that reality, I remain in prayer—moving forward with courage and caution—as Your faithful servant. Please guide me as I go, Amen._
“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path,” Psalms 119:105.

God made His will known to man. Again and again, in this psalm, His will is called a “way” or a “path,” Psalms 119:2,3. We are asked to walk in it.

“I mediate on Your precepts and consider Your ways,” Psalms 119:15.

A way or path is not a place to sit down. It is a road where one moves forward, a route along which one travels. The path of God is a journey, a venture of faith.

“Direct me in the path of Your commands, for there I find delight,” Psalms 119:35.

During every age in history, during all situations of life, His way has been found reliable. His word is true. His counsel speaks to everyone, comforts in any trouble, guides through all perplexities. The traveler must stay on the path. In the darkest nights, in the blackest circumstances, the light of the Lord will illuminate the way.

- **Lamp.** A “lamp” was a symbol of divine leading, II Samuel 22:29. God lights the path, leads the way through darkness, Job 29:2,3. His “teaching is a light…the way of life,” Proverbs 6:23. Yet the metaphor must not be misunderstood. A lamp in the ancient world was not a powerful beam of light. It barely shined one step ahead. As the traveler cautiously moved along the path, the light made things visible a few inches at a time.

- **Light.** A “light” was a symbol of divine presence, Revelation 21:23; 22:5. God is with His followers. His light is the source of life, Psalms 56:13. Therefore, when man is in the darkness of ignorance or despair, the Lord is a light to him, Psalms 18:28; Isaiah 9:2. The light does not dispel all of the darkness. The problems of life do not vanish. God helps us see—see a short distance ahead, see a few obstacles along the way.

“Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. May I be content to follow it one step at a time. Through Jesus, my light and my Lord, Amen.”
“You have said harsh things against Me,” Malachi 3:13.

The Lord loves His people. The pure in heart believe in the fairness of God. Regardless of the circumstances, they put their trust in Him, Psalms 73:1. Other folks are not so sure. In difficult times, when the wicked prosper, those who have a shallow trust in God are more vulnerable.

“But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked,” Psalms 73:2,3.

On the slippery slope of tentative faith, “harsh things” are said about God, Malachi 3:13. The basic meaning of “harsh” is “strong,” 1 Kings 20:23. The term carries the sense of “severe,” Genesis 41:56, and “hard,” Exodus 7:13. The word is translated in various ways because it occurs in different contexts (though the underlying idea is the same). Doubters are prone to say harsh, severe, and hard things against God.

The reluctant say that it is “futile” to serve Him. There is no “gain” in keeping His commands, Malachi 3:14,15. These people believe religion ought to pay big dividends now. It ought to bring great rewards immediately. The general feeling is that folks surely will not serve God for nothing, Job 1:9. In spite of that sentiment, the faithful may live a lifetime without seeing a reward, Hebrews 11:13.

- **Harsh words.** Religious hirelings—those who obey for the sake of a reward—feel cheated. They go about like “mourners” for no profit, Malachi 3:14. God gains nothing from their righteousness, Job 22:2,3. This stark reality causes many atheists to blaspheme openly. It causes some believers to weep secretly. Those who have harsh words for God are pretenders. They do not really trust God, Isaiah 58:3,4. Their hearts are far from the Lord. They worship Him in vain, Matthew 15:8,9. Beware! Their “harsh words” will be silenced, Jude 14,15.

- **Quiet hopes.** There are also those who “fear the Lord.” They talk among themselves. God “listens,” Malachi 3:16. Their positive thoughts about Him are written on “a scroll of remembrance.” They know in whom they have believed, II Timothy 1:12. They trust—that if they endure—they will reign with Him, II Timothy 2:12. They are sure that those who persevere will be blessed, James 5:11. Therefore, “judge nothing before the appointed time,” 1 Corinthians 4:5. In the end, God will claim His faithful servants, Malachi 3:17,18.

Lord, life does not always seem fair. I know You are just and equitable in all Your ways. Give me the faith to be patient. May no harsh words come out of my mouth. This is my plea, in Your beloved Son, Amen.
“The one the Lord loves rests between His shoulders,” Deuteronomy 33:12.

It was common in the ancient world for a dying patriarch to gather his sons for a final blessing, Genesis 49:1. Thus, before Moses died, he blessed the tribes of Israel, Deuteronomy 33:1. The blessing of Moses consisted of prayers, praises, commands, and prophecies for each tribe—including Benjamin.

Benjamin was the youngest son of Jacob. His descendants were one of the smallest (in number) of the twelve tribes of Israel. In more ways than one, therefore, Benjamin was the baby brother, the weakest tribe.

Still Benjamin was the object of divine affection. He was called “the beloved of the Lord.” In spite of his size, he was “secure” because he rested “between the shoulders” of God, Deuteronomy 33:12. In other words, as a loving parent, the Lord (figuratively) carried Benjamin on His back, Deuteronomy 1:31.

- **The Lord protected Benjamin.** The tribe of Benjamin was special to Jehovah. The Lord made Himself known to them, Deuteronomy 33:2. In return, Benjamin gave Him reverent respect. God was their King, Deuteronomy 33:3-5. So, as a result, Benjamin basked in His loving protection. There was no God like their God, Deuteronomy 33:26. He was the refuge of His children, Deuteronomy 33:27. His everlasting arms supported them “all day long,” Deuteronomy 33:12. Benjamin was safe, Deuteronomy 12:10.

- **The Lord loved Benjamin.** The human race is the offspring of God, Acts 17:28. Yet, within the masses of humanity, Benjamin was a special group—the beloved of God. Out of an incredible compassion, He bent down and embraced them as His own children. He dandled them on His knee, cradled them in His arms, and carried them on His back. The tribe of Benjamin was His kids. This was not a surprise. After all, they rested “between His shoulders,” cf. Exodus 28:9-12, 29,30.

  The eternal God was their refuge.  
  Underneath them were His everlasting arms.  
  He drove out their enemies before them.  

The same is true of us. The Father Himself loves us because we love His Son, John 16:27. We are His children. We call Him “daddy,” Romans 8:15-17. He watches over us, cares for us in times of need, John 10:29; 1 Peter 5:7. In the last day, He will take us home to live with Him forever, John 6:38-40. In the meantime, we are safe “between His shoulders,” Deuteronomy 33:12; cf. Psalms 121:1-8.

  Father, I have no worries. I am safe because You have made Your security mine. Thanks for the piggy back ride. In Him, who watches over me, Amen.
June 8

“We must obey God rather than man!” Acts 5:29.

There are some things that might be done. There are other things that must be done. Life is a mixture of options and obligations. Usually it is possible to obey God and man without any contradiction in loyalty. But a crisis develops when man asks one thing and God demands another. This was the dilemma of the apostles. The Lord told them to speak out, Acts 5:20. The assembly of the elders directed them to keep their mouths shut, Acts 5:28.

- **Demands of God.** The highest allegiance of man belongs to the Lord. He made us. We are His offspring. “For in Him we live and move and have our being,” Acts 17:28. He is the sovereign Master of the universe. “He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice,” Acts 17:31. Everyone must decide, then, whether it is right to serve God or man, Acts 4:19. The conflicts on earth are the disciplines of heaven.

- **Responses of man.** Obedience is submission to authority, II Corinthians 2:9; Philippians 2:12; Titus 3:1. Jesus said, “Whoever has My commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves Me,” John 14:21a; cf. John 14:23a; 15:10. Obedience properly understood is never a cold, impersonal obligation. On the contrary, it is a living relationship with God, I John 2:3; 3:21-24; 5:3.

The apostles were “commanded” to cease and desist from preaching about Jesus, Acts 4:18. But they went out “and spoke the word of God boldly,” Acts 4:31. Again they were “ordered” not to “speak in the name of Jesus,” Acts 5:40. Yet “they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news” that Jesus was the Christ, Acts 5:42.

It is obvious that the apostles had courage. A prudent person—who was concerned for his safety—would have done otherwise. Their conduct seemed incredible, almost reckless, until we hear their rationale: “we must obey God rather than man!” Acts 5:29. Their first priority was their relationship with heaven. They knew before they could wear their crown they must carry their cross.

We might sacrifice without obeying,
But we cannot obey without sacrificing.

Civil disobedience is risky. The outcome was very real. The apostles were “flogged,” Acts 5:40. Hence, there are times to ignore the authorities of government, Exodus 1:17. There are also times to submit to government authorities, I Peter 2:13.

The message is clear. One should give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give to God what belongs to God, Matthew 22:21. Nevertheless, when behavior results in a conflict between God and government, God must get the nod.

Lord, ruler of heaven and earth, Your will is my command. I obey You because I love You. May it always be so. In Your Son, who learned obedience in suffering. Amen.
June 9

“We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You,” II Chronicles 20:12.

In the waning years of king Jehoshaphat, a major military crisis suddenly arose, II Chronicles 20:1,2. Though he had several options from which to choose, Jehoshaphat turned to the Lord, II Chronicles 20:3. He offered one of the grandest prayers ever uttered. He received one of the greatest blessings ever given.

• **He relied on God.** Jehoshaphat believed that God was sovereign, II Chronicles 20:6; cf. I Chronicles 29:11; Daniel 4:17. He believed the Lord would protect those who “continue wholeheartedly” in His way, II Chronicles 6:14. Jehoshaphat had a huge army, II Chronicles 17:14-19. Nevertheless, when the enemy approached, he relied on God.

• **He trusted in heaven.** If we forget the Lord, when responding to challenges, no matter how vast our resources, we will be defeated, II Chronicles 24:23,24. Beyond any doubt, our God is a mighty fortress in times of need, Psalms 46:1,7. As Jehoshaphat marched out to meet his foe, he went in the strength of the Lord. He said to his troops:

  “Do not be afraid...For the battle is not yours but God’s.... You will not have to fight this battle...stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you.” II Chronicles 20:15-17.

• **He waited for God.** Some trust in chariots. Others trust in horses. Jehoshaphat waited for the Lord, Psalms 20:7. In his hour of despair, not knowing what he should do, he fixed his eyes on God, II Chronicles 20:12; cf. Psalms 123:2; 141:8.


Jehoshaphat waited for a response from heaven. His eyes were on the Lord—trusting, desiring, and expecting an answer, Psalms 25:15; 121:1,2. In a similar crisis, Asa, the father of Jehoshaphat, had anticipated help from above, II Chronicles 14:11. Like father, like son—Jehoshaphat depended on God.

The promises of God are sure. He keeps His word, Joshua 23:14. The Lord will be with us, provide for us, and sustain us. Not one word will fail of all the good promises He gives to His people, I Kings 8:56. Trust Him. For, as prayer without faith is hypocritical, so faith without prayer is presumptuous.

_Sovereign God, I am powerless against my foes. The battle is Yours. The victory is sure. My eyes are fixed on You. Because You have promised, Amen._
June 10


Life is full of decisions. Many can be avoided. One must be made: should a person go his way or God’s way? The choice seems obvious. But human decision can often baffle prudent calculation.

Moses laid before the people a choice—life or death, Deuteronomy 30:15. The decision was within their ability to make. The will of God had been revealed. It was not spoken in secret, Isaiah 45:19. Unlike other gods, Jehovah made His wishes clearly known, Deuteronomy 29:29.

Israel was informed, Deuteronomy 30:19. The alternatives were unmistakable. Neutrality was impossible. The people must choose—God or idols, life or death, Joshua 24:14,15. Their destiny was determined by their choice.

- **Choices.** All options are reduced to two. The first option is “to love the Lord,” Deuteronomy 30:16. Love is shown by walking in His ways, keeping His commands, I John 5:3. It results in life, Acts 17:28. The second option is to “turn away” from God, Deuteronomy 30:17. This is the road of disloyalty. It leads to rebellion, to serving other gods. It is a precarious choice, Deuteronomy 30:18.

- **Experiences.** Loyalty to God brings an abundance of “blessings” from heaven and long “life” on earth, Deuteronomy 30:19. These are the marrow of true prosperity, the fragrance of a happy existence. God promises. He will deliver. On the other hand, disloyalty to God results in pain and sorrow. Riches may increase but life will be drenched in sadness, I Timothy 6:9. The future of the wealthy is uncertain: “You will not live long in the land,” Deuteronomy 30:18b.

- **Destinies.** The destiny of the saint is life—here and hereafter. Though we are trapped in a physical body now, we will have a spiritual body later. “We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we will see Him as He is,” I John 3:2. The destiny of the sinner is a “curse,” Deuteronomy 11:26-28. “I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed,” Deuteronomy 8:19. Hopes will collapse. Dreams will disappear. Sinners will be filled with confusion and remorse. They will know too late—much to their grief—that things could have turned out otherwise.

There are two choices but only one desirable destiny.

God is gracious to set before us life, Deuteronomy 30:15. Every element of needed instruction is furnished. He appeals to our noblest instincts. He begs us to “choose life,” Deuteronomy 30:19b. We are writing our epitaph. What will it be? I John 5:11,12.

Kind Father, You have provided the rationale. You have given the incentives. My decision is clear. I want life. That is my choice, in Christ Jesus, Amen.
“I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked,” Ezekiel 33:11.

It is commonly thought that God is a celestial bully. Many believe He destined the greater part of the human family to eternal punishment. Does not the potter have control of the clay? Romans 9:21. Does He not get His kicks from making men miserable? A lot of people think so. The Bible is full of stern warnings. Surely He desires to do what He threatens. After all He said, “It is mine to avenge,” Deuteronomy 32:35. And vengeance is sweet!

The Jews in captivity may have entertained similar thoughts. They suggested that God was unfair. But the prophet disagreed. Ezekiel asked the exiles, “Is it not your ways that are unjust?” Ezekiel 18:29. He laid the blame for their situation on their doorstep.

Justice requires power—so that whatever is fair can be enforced and whatever is enforced can be fair.

God cared. He gave them a watchman. Ezekiel was assigned to warn the people of approaching trouble, Ezekiel 33:7. The Lord sent the prophet for their sake (not for His sake). If they chose to ignore the watchman, they did so at their own peril, Ezekiel 33:9. Israel tried to alibi their way out of their negligence, Ezekiel 33:17.

The prophet sounded the alarm. He warned the people of their doom, Ezekiel 5:7-12. Israel did not listen. Ezekiel did all he could do. The people were arrogant, Hosea 5:5. They failed to repent, Jeremiah 6:15; cf. Ezekiel 18:24. The blame fell squarely on their shoulders, Ezekiel 18:25.

- **God tried.** The Lord is not happy inflicting hurt, Ezekiel 18:23,32; 33:11. No truth is more obvious than His pain over the punishment of sinners. God is love. He sent His Son to rescue mankind from death row, I John 4:9,10. God is our father. He takes no pleasure in the death of His children, Hosea 11:8,9. Calvary is a bold, public statement of His compassion for all evil doers, Romans 5:6-8; cf. Lamentations 3:33.

- **Man failed.** The Lord pleaded with the people: “Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die?” Ezekiel 33:11. Death was their choice. They did not want to live, Ezekiel 33:2-5. They were responsible for their demise as surely as those who drink poison. The outcome could have been different, Ezekiel 33:14,15. Heaven wished the wicked would choose life, Luke 15:10.

God does not rejoice over the death of the wicked. However, we are all sinners, Romans 3:9-18. The Lord does not want any of us to perish, II Peter 3:9. There is no reason for despair. “Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life,” John 3:16.

*Lord, I know You love me. Your compassion sets me free from the fear of future punishment. I am secure. Because of Your Son, Amen.*
“All the believers were one in heart and mind.” Acts 4:32.

At a time of widespread religious division, it seems strange to speak of unity. There are literally hundreds of denominations claiming to be Christian. They meet separately. They often wage bitter debate. They are hopelessly at odds. God is not pleased, Romans 16:17. Can the first century Church give us clues for the healing of Christendom?

“Stand firm in the spirit, as one man contending for the faith.” Philippians 1:27.

The Church was called the “body of Christ,” Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18,24. And like us, Christ has always had just one body, Romans 12:4,5; I Corinthians 12:20. And, though the members have different functions, they are still just one entity, I Corinthians 12:14-20.

God designed the Church to be a harmonious unit. He designed her to have no divisions, I Corinthians 12:25a. Peaceful co-existence was intended, Colossians 3:15a. Numerical growth was expected, Ephesians 4:16. Ecclesiastical unity was demanded, I Corinthians 1:10.

- **Nature of the unity.** The early Christians “were one in heart and mind,” Acts 4:32. They were alike in feelings and desires. All of them had “set apart Christ as Lord” in their hearts, I Peter 3:15a. They nurtured the same hopes, held the same dreams, and sought the same purposes. They were united with Christ, like minded in spirit, Philippians 2:1,2.

- **Source of the unity.** The basis of their unity was spiritual. It came from God. The young Church was “filled with the Holy Spirit,” Acts 4:31. Unity was not found in the creeds of men. It was caught from the contagion of the Spirit, I Corinthians 12:13. It was a unanimity enjoyed by the saints and approved by men, Romans 14:17,18.

- **Effect of the unity.** The result of their unity became a practical outpouring of charity, Acts 4:32b. The walls of social class crumbled. The barriers of societal division faded. The Church moved as one. Members treated each other as family, Acts 4:34,35. They gave themselves “first to the Lord.” This was “in keeping with God’s will, II Corinthians 8:5. A wonderful transformation occurred. “And much grace was upon them all,” Acts 4:33.

The text verse (in Greek) actually described the believers as a “multitude,” Acts 4:32. The term “multitude” can also be translated “crowd.” The early Church was made up of a vast variety of people. They had numerous occupations, gifts, temperaments, and inclinations. The membership included over 5,000 men (plus women and children), Acts 4:4.

This crowd of people was held together by one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, Ephesians 4:4-6. They were glued together in the “unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace,” Ephesians 4:3. Should we not be like them? John 17:20,21.

*Father, You denounced divisions, yet the Church is shamefully fractured. You called us to unity. May I contribute to her healing. In Jesus, Amen.*
“We have the mind of Christ,” I Corinthians 2:16.

“Who understands the mind of the Lord?” Isaiah 40:13. What a silly question! No one does. No one knows the thoughts of God—except God! I Corinthians 2:11. How foolish, then, to judge the “secret wisdom” of the Lord, I Corinthians 2:7. For, if humans had known it, they would not have crucified Christ, I Corinthians 2:8.

People are curious. They want to know. Learning is part and parcel of life. Academies of science and math, conservatories of music and art, colleges of business and communication are found throughout the world. Yet who knows the mind of God?

“For, if humans had known it, they would not have crucified Christ, I Corinthians 2:8.

The school of heaven is unique. The wisdom of God is unparalleled. It stands above all human thought. The evidence speaks for itself.

• The knowledge. Under the tutelage of the Lord, a student learns the “deep things of God,” I Corinthians 2:10b. The “deep things” are beyond discovering. They are deep because they are “hidden” until God makes them known, I Corinthians 2:7. They concern the free gift of human redemption, I Corinthians 2:12. They are the “spiritual truths” embedded in the Gospel.

• The teacher. The lessons of salvation are taught by the Holy Spirit. He knows the thoughts of God, I Corinthians 2:11. He dwells in the heart of the believer, I Corinthians 6:19. The Spirit is intimately acquainted with both God and man. No one is more qualified to put into human language an understanding of the divine mind, I Corinthians 2:13.

• The curriculum. The unbeliever is not admitted into the school of heaven. He cannot fathom the lessons. He does not “accept” the instruction. He cannot pass the exams, I Corinthians 2:14. Moral purity is nonsense. Spiritual interests are “foolishness.” The unbeliever is incapable of critiquing divine truth. Hence, believers are not “subject to” (or under the jurisdiction of) his “judgment,” I Corinthians 2:15.

Blessed are those who have the “mind of Christ.” Believers will be puzzling to the world. But its condescension need not disturb. Its mockery need not dismay. The world simply does not comprehend God. Why should it understand the followers of God?

God of wisdom, You have given me insight into the unknown. There is much to learn. I am on the upward way. Fill my mind till the darkness of ignorance is replaced with the light of knowledge. I pray through Him who knows, Amen.
“The heart is deceitful above all things,” Jeremiah 17:9.

Israel was guilty. It was too obvious to ignore. The children knew it. The adults were to blame. The treasures God had given them would be taken away, Jeremiah 17:1-4.

Humans are victims. They fall prey to self-deception. They boast of their goodness while indulging in mischief, Matthew 23:27,28. Who can grasp the significance of this truth? Who can understand the folly of the human heart? Jeremiah 17:9.

• **Scientific ingenuity.** Surely man has the capacity to recognize error. Space travel and sub-atomic exploration require immense mental insight. If humans can plumb the deep mysteries of the universe, why are they unable to decipher the secrets within their hearts? The question is an appropriate one. It begs for an honest answer.

• **Spiritual ignorance.** Scientific progress does not negate the necessity of personal introspection. Know yourself is still valid advise. Indeed, it is a pressing necessity. Humans are often wise fools, Proverbs 18:2. They harness nature but cannot manage themselves, Romans 7:15. Something is wrong. They know about the external world. Yet they are unaware of their internal condition. What causes this blindness?

> God sees the clueless throng,  
> He reads their weakness clear;  
> He puts His finger on their heart,  
> And says, “You are sick right here!”

The Lord weighs the heart. Nothing is concealed from His sight, Jeremiah 11:20; 16:17; 20:12. Men are not honest. They cover their flaws, disguise their intentions. They become a contradiction—harshly condemning others while happily excusing themselves, Matthew 7:3. They pretend to know the truth but live a lie.

The prophet said, “the heart is deceitful,” Jeremiah 17:9. The term “deceitful” means “misleading,” Genesis 34:13. It often referred to shady business practices, Amos 8:5. A lying brush paints a distorted picture. The heart glosses over reality, smothers the truth in falsehood, Isaiah 5:18.

God searches the heart, Jeremiah 17:10. Nothing is hidden from His sight, Hebrews 4:13. The measure of a man is true when God does the measuring. He probes the deepest recesses. He cannot be fooled. He does what man cannot do. Examining the heart requires integrity in the examiner. God is holy. He sees reality. Trust Him. He can heal. He can save, Jeremiah 17:14.

> O Lord, You alone are competent to search my heart. It is vain to deny what You see, to excuse what You find. May I be open to Your inspection, receptive to Your assessment. My future depends on it. In Jesus name, Amen.
June 15

“In those days the word of the Lord was rare,” 1 Samuel 3:1.

Heaven was silent. God did not speak, Psalms 74:9. Israel groped in darkness. The results were disastrous. Life without the word of God is more deadly than a famine without bread, Amos 8:11; cf. Proverbs 29:18. The devil had a heyday.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, the silence ended. God spoke. His word made “the ears of those who heard tingle,” 1 Samuel 3:11. He kept His promise, Deuteronomy 18:15. He spoke to His newfound messenger, 1 Samuel 3:10.

A voice the silence broke,
“Samuel!” three times it spoke.
The lad was called by God,
In paths of right he trod.
New visions were received;
The souls of men were much relieved.

The word of God is precious, Job 28:16,17; Psalms 19:10; Proverbs 3:15. It is especially so when it is rare. In those days, “There were not many visions,” 1 Samuel 3:1. Israel was oblivious to her spiritual poverty. She was blind but hardly realized it!

• **The cause.** The calamity was the result of sin. For, though the people knew God, they did not glorify Him as God. Their thinking became futile. Their foolish hearts were darkened, Romans 1:21. Sin is a cataract. It covers the eye. It shuts out the light, Luke 11:34. Spiritual cataracts restrict the light from above, John 3:19-21.

• **The effect.** The signal from heaven was lost. Transmissions stopped. “Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him,” 1 Samuel 3:7. Israel had been abandoned. Her lamp stand had been removed, Revelation 2:5. Catastrophe stood at the door.

In this precarious hour, God stepped in. He appeared to Samuel. He spoke. His word was renewed. His guidance was restored. The people heard the voice of the Lord again. The light of life shined in their midst once more.

The lessons from this experience are compelling. The truth conveyed must not be ignored. God withdraws in times of human indifference Ezekiel 7:26. His absence may hardly be noticed. He departs because man turns away. Spiritual darkness takes over. Sin is the culprit. Yet “His love endures forever,” Psalms 136:1. He tries again. He breaks the silence in hope that man will listen. The choice is ours. Eternity waits.

Gracious Father, cleanse my heart that I may listen. Open my ears that I may hear. Speak that I may know. Do not let Your word become rare in my life. In the name of Him who is the Word of Life, Amen
God was disgusted. He sent Israel into exile. They were punished for their sin. The chronicle of their misdeeds read like a tabloid newspaper. Of all their transgressions, lying stood out prominently.

“Friend deceives friend, and no one speaks the truth. They have taught their tongues to lie; they weary themselves with sinning,” Jeremiah 9:5; cf. Isaiah 59:3,4.

Consequently, when the punishment was over, God wanted Jerusalem to be “The City of Truth,” Zechariah 8:3. Certain essential characteristics were required. So God said, “These are the things you are to do,” Zechariah 8:16a.

- **Speak truthfully.** Everyone should tell the truth, Zechariah 8:16b. How refreshing! As it is, both then and now, falsehood abounds. Business thrives on fraud. The courts are phony exercises in deception. Politics are a playground for deceit. Truth is rare. It is often thought to be a lie. The righteous become “disheartened,” Ezekiel 13:22. It is easy to speak. It is difficult to speak truthfully. In spite of the hardship, it is always wise to do so. For “a false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will not go free,” Proverbs 19:5.

- **Think kindly.** The citizens in the City of Truth must not “plot evil against their neighbor,” Zechariah 8:17. The surest defense against lying is nipping mischief in the bud. Tongues are kept from falsehood when minds are forbidden to imagine sin. People should “love their neighbor as themselves,” James 2:8; cf. Ephesians 4:25. Love does not delight in evil. Indeed, it cannot. It “rejoices in the truth,” I Corinthians 13:6.

- **Act responsibly.** God requires “true and sound judgment,” Zechariah 8:16. Integrity is demanded. Single mindedness is essential. Truth must abide in the mind, dwell on the lips, and saturate the conduct. It takes all three. “Can fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?” James 3:11,12. No! Of course not!

Unless the root and fruit are the same, sincerity is absent. Truth is mocked. Falsehood trails close behind. In life, actions speak louder than words. Without honorable behavior, all speech about ethical decorum is shallow hypocrisy. The words of our mouth and the meditations of our heart should be pleasing to the Lord, Psalms 19:14.

There are six things God hates. Seven things are detestable to Him. Lying tops the list, Proverbs 6:16-19. One must not trifle with falsehood. We are to hate what He hates. We are to speak the truth because He is true, Psalms 31:5; Jeremiah 10:10.

> Lord, I want to be honest with You, myself, and others. In spite of the pervasiveness of lying, may I think and act honorably. Through Him, who is the Truth, Amen.
“When the number of disciples was increasing ...some of them complained,” Acts 6:1.

Increasing membership does not always mean increasing happiness in the Church. Growing a Church is like growing wheat. In spite of the skill of the sower, the results are a mixture of weeds and grain, Matthew 13:24-26. The dangers of numerical expansion—the ingathering of people with different backgrounds—can be a trying experience. Such was the case in the early Church, I Corinthians 1:10-12.

Contemporary Christians often view first century believers through rose tinted glasses. The primitive Church was far from perfect. Some of her members were blatantly dishonest, Acts 5:1-10, and sexually immoral, I Corinthians 5:1,2. Others had sharp disagreements, Acts 15:36-39; Philippians 4:2, and arrogant attitudes, III John 9,10. Throughout the ages, the people in the pews have been a mixed bag of saints and sinners.

Nevertheless, in the body of Christ, weaknesses can be turned into blessings. Or, as the saying goes, the infirmity of man is the opportunity of God. If managed wisely, good results can come from bad situations. Significant damage can be avoided. A temporary setback can be turned into a permanent victory.

- **Involve others.** The problem (in Acts 6) gripped the whole congregation. Hence, “all the disciples” were invited to participate in the solution, Acts 6:2. There was much to be done. It required all hands on deck. Lest important matters be neglected, qualified members were asked to serve the needs of the disgruntle members, Acts 6:3,4.

- **Appoint helpers.** The “proposal pleased the whole group,” Acts 6:5. Seven men were put forward. The leaders approved them. The arrangement was blessed, Acts 6:6. The difficulty was not ignored. The offense was removed.

- **Discharge responsibilities.** The Church moved ahead because everyone was heard. Measures were put in place to care for those being overlooked. Complains were addressed. Friction was minimized. Responsibilities were discharged. Order was restored.

- **Expect results.** When qualified people perform needed ministries, the Church will grow, Acts 6:7. Of course, there will be more detours to navigate. Growth brings additional challenges. What goes around comes around. But, for the moment, life moves on. The Church regains her footing. The membership increases once more.

Occasions of complaint must be taken seriously. Philippians 2:14; I Peter 4:8,9. The brethren must exercise prudence. Vigilance is required. To do otherwise, leads to mistakes which expose the people of God to the ridicule of the world.

_God of peace and order! The Church can love disgruntle members. You have shown me how. May I follow Your advise. In Christ, who is Head over the Body, Amen._

God is firmly in control. "Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad. The Lord reigns," 1 Chronicles 16:31; Psalms 97:1. He always has, He is, and He always will be on His throne. "The Lord reigns forever," Psalms 29:10; 146:10. Beyond question, He has His hand on the helm of history.

No fact is better established. No truth is more clearly stated. The reign of God is real. He is "King forever and ever," Psalms 10:16. "The Lord Almighty is the King of glory," Psalms 24:9,10. He is sovereign in heaven and on earth. The Lord is both God and King, Psalms 44:4; 95:3; 145:1; 1 Timothy 6:15,16.

The reign of Jehovah was celebrated by Israel after crossing the Red Sea, Exodus 15:18. Gideon also mentioned the rule of the Lord, Judges 8:23. His reign was the cornerstone of their faith, Psalms 66:7; 103:19; Isaiah 24:23; 52:7; Daniel 4:17,25,32. In a similar way, the magnificence of His power and the grandeur of His authority buttressed the faith of the persecuted Church, Revelation 11:17; 19:6.

- **The power.** "The Lord reigns. He is robed in majesty," Psalms 93:1. He wears His power like a garment, Isaiah 51:9. He rules with invincible strength. He makes war against every antagonist, Isaiah 59:17,18. The governments of men threaten the kingdom of God to no avail. His throne is established above all the commotion. It will not totter nor fall. He reigns with absolute authority.

- **The effect.** "The Lord reigns. The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved," Psalms 96:10. The nations of the earth were invited to sing a new song—a song that recognized the greatness of Jehovah, Psalms 96:1,2. The nations praised His mighty name, Psalms 96:3-6. God stabilized the earth. All would be well, Psalms 96:7-10.

- **The response.** "The Lord reigns. Let the nations tremble," Psalms 99:1. Men cannot fathom the power of God. They cannot see Him. He does not "live in houses made with human hands," Acts 7:48. The Lord dwells in celestial glory. He sits enthroned above. He has all power. His name is awesome, Psalms 99:2,3.

  Under His throne,
  We dwell in peace.
  Trusting Him alone,
  Our anxieties cease.

Man should fall before the footstool of heaven. God deserves our respect. His reign gives new meaning to prayer, new passion for life, new joy in service, Psalms 93:2-5.

When their security is threatened, nations seek help from other countries. Judah did, Isaiah 30:1-5. She was acting as if God had no control over international affairs.

Her clever diplomacy in securing a political alliance with Egypt was futile, Isaiah 30:7. Judah must repent, Isaiah 30:15. Her “salvation” depended on trusting Jehovah.

The Lord had spoken, Isaiah 30:12a. He is faithful. He does not leave nor forsake those who trust Him, Psalms 27:9. Of that we can be confident. Hence, the children of God should “wait for the Lord.”

Indeed, in all national emergencies, we should “be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord,” Psalms 27:13,14. Such waiting is characterized by two things.

- **Quietness.** Tranquility is the absence of trouble and strife. It signals a “rest from war,” Joshua 11:23. A state of peace is clearly dependent on, and a direct result of, the blessing of God, II Chronicles 20:30. The Lord promised Judah quietness no matter how great the threat of invasion, Jeremiah 30:10. This sense of calm was not due to a psychological hocus-pocus but a willingness to trust Jehovah, II Chronicles 14:5,6.

- **Trust.** God gives security to those who depend on Him, Psalms 4:8; Isaiah 26:3. He will answer their prayers in times of distress, I Chronicles 5:20. He will give them joy and gladness, Psalms 16:8,9; 33:21. He will deliver them from besetting troubles, Psalms 22:4,5. Therefore, the people of God are repeatedly encouraged to trust in the Lord, Proverbs 3:5,6; 16:20; Jeremiah 17:7.

Quietness and trust in God yields a confident expectation. The world lives in anxious fear. Christians rest in calm assurance. The faithfulness of Jehovah is the difference, Deuteronomy 33:28,29; I Samuel 12:11; Psalms 27:1-3. It is better to be utterly dependent on a trustworthy God than expect help from government politicians. The choice is a no-brainer.

National security starts with turning to the Lord, depending on His promise to provide safety. Human treaties are paper tigers. Military armament is limited. Man must not depend on them. Quiet trust in God is the only hope.


_Holy Father, Sovereign Lord. You control history._
_Your will be done. My security is in Your hands._
_My strength comes from above. I wait in confidence._
_What need I fear? In Christ Jesus, Amen._
“Do your best to present yourself to God,” II Timothy 2:15.

Timothy was facing a cantankerous congregation. It was “quarreling about words,” II Timothy 2:14. The quibbling was “meaningless,” I Timothy 1:6. It portrayed an “unhealthy interest in controversy,” I Timothy 6:3-5.

Foolish arguments are “unprofitable.” They have “no value.” They divide the Church. They “ruin those who listen,” II Timothy 2:14; Titus 3:9. It is imperative that Timothy “avoid godless chatter,” II Timothy 2:16.

Arguments over personal opinion cease in the presence of God, Romans 14:10. Such behavior is out of place in the throne room of heaven, Hebrews 4:13. Contentious strife to win pointless debates over hair splitting issues is silly. God is the final judge, II Corinthians 10:18. Paul advises Timothy to “present” himself to the Supreme Magistrate. The Lord would commend him if he satisfied three conditions:

- **Approved.** To be “approved” was to be tested, Romans 14:18; 16:10; I Corinthians 11:19; II Corinthians 13:7; James 1:12. The testing measured genuineness. The term was used for a quarried stone that fit into its designated place. Hence, it was accepted. Through testing, Timothy would earn the seal of approval.

- **Without shame.** The world holds the Gospel in contempt. The believer must not, II Timothy 1:8,12,16. The young evangelist should not be humiliated when silencing the divisive sparring of quarrelsome men. These quibblers will try to shame Timothy. He must not cower when they laugh at his leadership, I Timothy 4:12; cf. Romans 10:11.

- **Handling correctly the word of God.** The phrase literally meant “to cut correctly.” It applied to plowing a straight furrow. The idea of rightness was primary. The cutting was secondary, Proverbs 11:5. “To correctly handle” described the right way of discussing scripture, II Timothy 2:23,24. All perilous deviations must be excluded. Striving about words is off limits. Irrelevant detours into senseless argument must be avoided, I Timothy 6:20,21. Teachers of the word must side step the trap of satan. They must gently bring others nearer to God, II Timothy 2:25,26; cf. Ephesians 4:29.

The Church must refuse to change, pervert, mutilate, or distort the message of heaven, I Peter 4:11. She should recognize that arguing about the truth is not the same as obeying the truth. She should refrain from discussing scripture as if that was equal to doing what it says. The word of God must remain the word of God. Only those who believe it, study it, and, above all, follow it will be approved.

*Your word, O Lord, is a precious gift. You have asked me to handle it carefully. May I avoid the gangrene of profane babbling. I stand in Your presence desiring Your approval. Anything else is unacceptable. I pray through Him who is my Judge. Amen.*
“They did not come to help the Lord,” Judges 5:23.

A national emergency had developed. A foreign army occupied the land. The people of God were “cruelly oppressed,” Judges 4:3. A summons was sounded.

A call to arms was heard by all. Some came to help, Judges 5:14,15a. They were “willing volunteers,” Judges 5:9. They “risked their very lives,” Judges 5:18. Others did “much searching of heart” but stayed at home, Judges 5:15b,16.

It is sad when God is ignored, when people turn a deaf ear, Matthew 23:37. They put other things ahead of the Lord. With calloused disregard, they excuse themselves. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” they ask, Genesis 4:9. As a result, the minority carried the load.

- **Selfless commitments.** “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man,” Romans 5:7. The human race tends to timidly hold back from self-sacrifice. Life is dear. The cost is high. The restraining bonds of selfishness are strong. But, when called “to no longer live for themselves,” the saints will overcome the inertia of reluctance, II Corinthians 5:14,15. They will climb on the altar and lay down their lives. The beauty of selflessness is not confined to extraordinary occasions of extreme emergency. It is also found in the quiet corners of everyday life—parents taking time with children and neighbors helping those next door.

  “Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another,” I John 4:11.

- **Hindering causes.** There is a counter call to the voice of sacrifice. It is loud and persuasive—the call “to linger by the ships,” to stay put, Judges 5:17. How could they jeopardize their livelihood? Why should they forsake their families? Why put themselves in harm’s way. Lives could be lost! Therefore, let those who are cruelly oppressed fight their own battles! As a result, the cause of the Lord was abandoned. The bonds of brotherhood were broken. The memory of misplaced affection was all that remained, I John 2:15-17. The negligent were “bitterly cursed,” Judges 5:23.

Since the village of Meroz was not for God, it was against Him, Matthew 12:30. Their neutrality was unacceptable. If God calls for action, inaction is condemned. It supports the enemy. The honor of God is shamed. His call to duty was an invitation to be faithful. Zeal for the Lord, sympathy for the brethren must come first. Indifference is not a viable option. Who is on the Lord’s side? When He calls, it is time to respond, to rally around His just and righteous cause, cf. Exodus 32:25,26. The purposes of heaven hang precariously in the balance.

*Lord, God, I salute You as the Commander-in-Chief. The battle lines are drawn. Your noble purpose is challenged. Skeptics attack. The media belittles. Science scoffs. You asked me to stand for truth. May I willingly volunteer, risk my life, give my all. In Him, who did, Amen.*
June 22

“Those who seemed to be important,” Galatians 2:6.

In decision making, humans rely on their five senses—see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. Yet sense perception is often misleading. Jacob used it to trick his blind father, Genesis 27:1-40. Samuel misread his first impressions, I Samuel 16:6,7. What looked to be one way was actually another. Jesus pointed out that people are not always what they seem to be, Matthew 23:27,28. “Looking only on the surface of things” can misguide, II Corinthians 10:7.


The leaders in the Jerusalem Church “seemed to be important,” Galatians 2:6. They were “reputed to be pillars” in the congregation, Galatians 2:9. And rightly so. James, Peter, and John were with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry. They witnessed the resurrection. They saw the ascension. Paul was a Johnny-come-lately. By his own admission, he was both “last” and “least” of the apostles, I Corinthians 15:7-9.

Paul was not disparaging the reputation of the other apostles. It was not his interest to do so. Rather his intention was to show that they sanctioned his ministry, Galatians 2:9. Some brethren unduly elevated the importance of the pillar apostles. In effect, they established a hierarchy in the Church. Paul would have none of it. In matters of faith, the status of men carried no weight, Galatians 2:6. God determines such matters, Galatians 2:7,8. In other words, as important as they might have appeared, James, Peter, and John did not appoint Paul an apostle.

• **He respected those in authority.** Paul gave honor to whom honor was due, Romans 13:7. Though he was called by God, as a courtesy, he introduced himself to avoid being rude. Polite respect preserved the unity of the Church, Ephesians 4:1-3.

• **He remained conscious of his assignment.** Paul held on to his conviction. He knew what he was supposed to do regardless of the opinion of the reputed pillars, Galatians 2:8. He “did not give in to them for a moment,” Galatians 2:5a. The call of God gave him the strength of God.

• **He sought the approval of heaven.** Paul refused to be overwhelmed. He respected the pillar apostles but did not grovel. He treated them with kindness but was not overawed. No cringing! No cowering! The truth—that Gentiles were subject to the Gospel—was at stake, Galatians 2:5b. Though the apostles in Jerusalem “seemed to be important,” though they acknowledged his ministry, Paul was most interested in the “approval” of God, Galatians 1:10.

June 23

“The eyes of the Lord are everywhere,” Proverbs 15:3.

God can see. He sees it all—both big and small, Jeremiah 23:24. Nothing is hidden from Him, Hebrews 4:13. It is unbearable for some folks to realize they cannot get away from the all seeing eyes of heaven. Therefore, many prefer to believe that God is blind.

Is it any less scary to suppose the universe is driven by sightless energy? Does history bump along with no fixed purpose? Are we the hapless victims of unseeing forces? What comfort is gained by blindfolding God?

The Lord is always nigh,
Seeing us with a watchful eye;
Our every thought is known,
As if they were His own.

• **God sees everything.** He never sleeps. He never slumbers, Psalms 121:4. As a faithful watchman, He observes the world, Proverbs 15:3. All men have eyes but most of them do not see. They pass the obvious without noticing, Isaiah 6:9,10. They are dreamers living in a world of their own fantasies. How can they think God is sightless when they themselves cannot see? Is this not “the blind leading the blind?” Luke 6:39.

• **God sees everywhere.** He sees what is near and far, what is obvious and obscure. Distance does not diminish His sight. Fog does not blur His vision. He counts the stars. He numbers the hairs on every head, Matthew 10:30. Not one sparrow falls to the ground unnoticed, Matthew 10:29. Surely God sees us. He knows when we sit down or stand up. Before a word is formed in our mouth, He is completely aware of it, Psalms 139:1-4.

God sees. He sees the unseen. “Death and Destruction lie open before the Lord—how much more the hearts of men,” Proverbs 15:11. Death and destruction were synonyms for the grave. The grave was believed to be located in the heart of the earth, inaccessible to human sight, beyond the perception of man. It is a place shrouded in obscurity, secrecy, and mystery. Yet God knows all about it. The grave is fully exposed before Him, Job 26:6.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
See if there be any wicked way in me,” Psalms 139:23,24a.

It is no wonder then that the assessment of man is at variance with the judgment of God, Proverbs 16:2; 21:2. We weight ourselves by lowering the bar, by tipping the scale. We clean the outside of the cup but inside we are full of self indulgence, Matthew 23:25,26. The lesson is clear. God should be the examiner. He has 20/20 vision.

*Father, it is a joy to be the “apple of Your eye,” to reside under Your wings.
Do not let me out of Your sight. In Him, who always sees everything. Amen.*
“I have done nothing...without cause,” Ezekiel 14:23.

Life befuddles the smartest minds. Even the deepest thinkers cannot unravel divine providence. God defies explanation, Job 11:7-9. At certain times, He seems to be fair and equitable. At other times, He appears to be inconsistent and contradictory.

Jerusalem was teetering on the edge. Punishment was headed her way, Ezekiel 7:10-14. Many Israelites were startled at the sternness of God. They wondered if the Lord had sufficient cause for inflicting such pain. Was the visitation of heaven disproportionate in its severity?

God had no pity. He acted like an enemy toward His people, Lamentations 2:2,5. Though often amazed by the aptness of His actions, many folks were perplexed. And rightly so! How can the subjects of His wrath understand His goodness? Romans 11:22.

- **He acts with reason.** The failure to see adequate cause does not prove its absence. Gravity exists in spite of its invisibility. The mind of man is not the measure of God, Isaiah 55:8,9. Since there is design in creation, there must be forethought in providence. What pervades the one surely permeates the other. God does not aimlessly muddle along, Psalms 9:8. He proceeds with moral intent, Genesis 18:25. The Lord does not send chastisement without due cause.

- **He moves with purpose.** His punishments are not arbitrary or excessive. Israel had sinned. Judgment was necessary, Ezekiel 14:7,8. Amid the hurt, His purpose was clear: “to recapture the hearts of the people,” Ezekiel 14:5. It is quite impossible to see His cause in the middle of a crisis, to understand His correction when sitting in detention, Job 26:14. The student rarely grasps the utility of school while doing his homework. We are forced to walk by faith. Eternity will illuminate the dark passages in time. There will be a full explanation later. The discovery of ample cause will be sufficient consolation, II Corinthians 4:16-18.

  “Show me Your ways, O Lord, teach me Your paths; guide me in Your truth,...for You are God my Savior, and my hope is in You all day long,” Psalms 25:4,5.

In the passing of time, the righteousness of God will become obvious, Ezekiel 34:25-31. From hindsight, the punishment of Jerusalem was deserved. The evidence is convincing. God is good, Psalms 25:8-10. His intentions are always based on due cause.

  Sovereign Lord, I believe You bend over backwards to be fair. Your thoughts and deeds are always right. Should events in life obscure Your justice, let me patiently wait for its vindication. In the name of the righteous One, Amen.
“My Father is always at His work to this very day,” John 5:17.


Self-righteous legalism aimed its hostility at Jesus. With blind rage, the Jews schemed to kill Him, John 5:18. The Lord did not flinch. “My Father is always at His work, He said. “And I, too, am working,” John 5:17. The implications of His reply are enormously enlightening.

- **God is busy.** In effect, Jesus raised an important issue. Is idleness the essence of the Sabbath? On that day, is all work (including deeds of mercy) wrong? The Sabbath rest was based on the example of God, Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:11; 31:17. But must not Jehovah be active every day? He has a world to maintain. Philo, a first century Jewish scholar, said, “God never ceases working.” Is God, then, a Sabbath breaker? Is the Giver of the law a transgressor of the law? Though God rested on the seventh day, He rested from creation. His work of providence continued.

- **Jesus is busy.** Healing the invalid was the handiwork of a merciful Father. As the Son of God, Jesus was a visual aid of God’s work, John 5:19. Sovereignty over life was chief among His tasks, John 5:21. The Lord was not saying He imitated the Father. No! He did the actual work of the Father. God cared for plants and animals on the Sabbath. Should He not care for humans on that day? To quibble about a Sabbath rule is to miss the point. Jesus is the Giver of life to all who believe, John 5:24-26. The work of Jesus is as necessary as the work of God. Indeed, they are one and the same.

- **Christians should be busy.** If God (and His Son) work without ceasing, should not His followers do likewise? Surely they must be involved. If any day was a suitable occasion for God to heal, any day is an appropriate time for believers to do good deeds. Once in kinship with the Lord, a new standard of living is adopted. Because He works, believers work, too, Colossians 1:10; Titus 3:1.

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath,” Mark 2:27.

The Sabbath provided a pause in the busyness of life to focus on God. If it drew one close to God, should it not lead him to live like God? And, if we live like God, should we not help our fellow man (regardless of what day it is)?

Father of mercy, God of compassion, I think I get it. You do not have office hours. You are ready to take care of my needs every hour of every day. Help me be like You. In Jesus, who is always busy, Amen.
“The Lord will be a refuge for His people,” Joel 3:16.

Jehovah was poised for judgment, Joel 3:12,13. The multitudes were gathered for a decisive encounter in the “valley of decision,” Joel 3:14. The momentous event was accompanied by fearful darkness, terrifying thunder, and unsettling earthquakes, Joel 3:15,16a.

The day of decision, the dreadful day,
When heaven and earth will pass away,
What help will come my way?
Who can rescue on the final day?

When the Lord punishes the wicked, apprehension grips the righteous. The scene is awesome. The desolation is alarming. The catastrophe is inevitable. But Jehovah steps in. He reassures His people. He promises to be a “stronghold” in troubled times, Joel 3:16b. The eternal God is our “refuge,” Deuteronomy 33:27.

- **Refuge of hope.** God gives hope in troubled times. “Even in death the righteous have a refuge,” Proverbs 14:32. He is a harbor of safety, a fortress of protection. During an enemy attack, “His afflicted people will find refuge,” Isaiah 14:32. They long to dwell in His house forever, “to take refuge in the shelter of His wings,” Psalms 61:4. The voyage may be stormy, but calm prevails in the heavenly harbor, Psalms 62:5.

- **Refuge of happiness.** The Lord is like a rock, Psalms 94:22. He is like a shield, Psalms 144:2. When all else fails, Jehovah rescues those who rely on Him, Proverbs 14:26. The terrors of judgment will overcome the wicked while “the way of Lord is a refuge for the righteous,” Proverbs 10:29. Amid all the trials of life, God is the happiness of His people, the strength of everyone who trusts in Him, Nahum 1:7.

- **Refuge of holiness.** The coming judgment will purge the land. “Jerusalem will be holy,” Joel 3:17; cf. Isaiah 60:21; Zechariah 14:21. Before the judgment, sinner and saint lived side by side. There were weeds among the wheat, chaff mixed with the grain. Yet it will not always be so. In heaven, hope will be realized, happiness will be found, and holiness will be complete. Strangers may wander into the Church, but will not step foot into the throne room of God, Isaiah 35:8.


I run to Your protecting embrace, Lord.
Hold me tight. Keep me secure. I long
for that wonderful day of eternal joy. May
it come quickly. In Christ, my refuge, Amen.

Everyone is a sinner, Romans 3:23. All are dead in their transgressions, Ephesians 2:1. “Powerless” to save themselves, Romans 5:6, humans are “without hope” of salvation, Ephesians 2:12. Jesus stepped forward. He died for the ungodly, Romans 5:8, “the righteous for the unrighteous,” 1 Peter 3:18. Why, then, should humans stop sinning?

Divine mercy can be misconstrued. Those who are looking for an excuse to sin turn the redemption of sinners into a justification for sinning, Romans 3:5a. Does not the sin of man give God an opportunity to demonstrate His grace? Yes! So, it is falsely argued, sin is a good thing. But, if that be true, the worst sinner makes the best saint.

“How absurd! Such is the height of twisted thinking. For, using the same logic, it would be good to break the heart of a friend because it gives him a chance to show forgiveness. Furthermore, if identifying evil as good becomes the basis of acquittal, everyone would be acquitted. And, if everyone is acquitted, “how could God judge the world?” Romans 3:6.

Can one really say wickedness contributes to the righteousness of God? It is a dangerous perversion to view what is bad as something good. It makes a mockery of divine justice. God does not treat the righteous and the wicked alike, Genesis 18:25. To promote evil that good may result is nonsense. It sets the world adrift in moral anarchy.

- **Motive is important.** It is true. God brought good out of evil. But that does not make evil any less evil. A man forges a check. He plans to steal from his employer. The employer stops payment on the check. The intentions of the thief are overturned. The forger asks, “if my folly prompted kindness, why should I be punished,” Romans 3:7. For one reason: forgery is a crime. The motive was wrong (though the theft was averted).

- **Consequences still remain.** It is deceitful to put a good label on a bad deed. It allows sin to flourish. It ignores the feelings of God. He hates sin, Proverbs 6:16-19. His people should hate sin, too, Psalms 97:10; Proverbs 8:13; Amos 5:15. Forgiveness of past indiscretion does not remove the consequences of former sin. To say “let us do evil that good may result” misses the point. The end does not justify the means. Criminals may provide policemen with work but they must face the consequences of their crime.

It is self-justifying to sin “for a good cause.” It sugar coats reality, blinds common sense, and leads to ethical disaster. Willful sin always hurts, Hebrews 10:26,27. Be assured, there will be a judgment day. Sin will be punished, Hebrews 10:30. The clock is ticking!

*Father. Have mercy on me. My flesh pulls me down. The world entices me with muddled thinking. Sorting it all out is difficult. Show me the truth so that I can walk in it. In the One, to whom I will give an account, Amen.*
“If after all this you do not listen,” Leviticus 26:18.

God promised to bless His people. They were guaranteed food, Leviticus 26:4-5, and protection, Leviticus 26:6-8. The Lord would be with them, Leviticus 26:11,12. These marvelous blessings would be theirs “if” they obeyed His commands, Leviticus 26:3.

How could such an offer be rejected? How could Israel neglect to do His will? Jehovah warned them. He sounded the alarm—loud and clear, Leviticus 26:14-17. Five times He cautioned them to pay attention, Leviticus 26:14,18,21,23,27. Yet they turned a deaf ear!


“Godliness has...promise for both the present life and the life to come,” I Timothy 4:8.

Israel opted not to listen. They did not obey “all” His commandments, Leviticus 26:14. They picked and chose to suit their taste, to oblige their convenience, II Kings 17:15. Their refusal to listen brought dire consequences, Leviticus 26:21,22. Their country collapsed. Their cities became ruins. Their families were scattered.

• **Reason for their deafness.** Why do men fail to listen? The judgment of God was delayed. The people probably thought the Lord did not see. Or God paid no heed, Psalms 94:7. His delay was interpreted as indifference, Ecclesiastes 8:11. Instead of recognizing His patience as an invitation to repent, they believed it was an encouragement to do as they pleased, II Peter 3:3,4.

• **Consequences of their deafness.** If there is not an immediate punishment of sin, man is inclined to think God does not care. He does not interfere in human affairs. His warnings are empty. He is absent. He has left humans to follow their own devices. Such reasoning, however, is a recipe for disaster. “It is mine to avenge,” God said, “I will repay,” Deuteronomy 32:35.

The predictions concerning Israel came true. Down to the minute details, the Lord laid out the history of His chosen people. This cannot be explained as a fortunate guess or an accidental coincidence. God knew the end from the beginning, Isaiah 46:10; 48:3-6.

Jehovah saw their sin. He promised to forgive, Leviticus 26:40-42. God would remember His covenant, Leviticus 26:45. He would teach them what is best. He would show them the way they should go, Isaiah 48:17. He still does! Praise His name. Are we listening?

*Gracious Lord, I am listening. You know where I am headed. Keep me from obstinacy. Teach me what is right. Remember Your covenant. In Him, Amen.*
June  29

“Who is a God like You?”  Micah 7:18.

There are millions of gods.  They come in all shapes and sizes, of every stripe and kind.  These gods are trusted by billions of adoring worshippers.  Surrounded by the smoke and noise of their rituals, one is compelled to inquire about the nature of these gods.  Are all of them equally kind, equally powerful, and equally true.  Are these gods like Jehovah?  Exodus 15:11.  Absolutely not!  What god is there in heaven or on earth that can do the mighty deeds God does?  Deuteronomy 3:24; cf.  Deuteronomy 4:34.

Yahweh is beyond comparison among divine beings.  There is simply none like Him, none even approaching equality with Him.  He is magnificent in holiness, dazzling in splendor, and extraordinary in accomplishment.

•  He is unsurpassed in majesty, Deuteronomy 33:26.
•  He is unmatched in faithfulness, I Kings 8:23.
•  He is unparalleled in compassion, Psalms 35:10.
•  He is unequalled in attentiveness, Psalms 113:5,6.

There is simply no one like the Lord, Exodus 8:10.  Yahweh is without comparison.  None of the gods are close to being like Him.  He stands above all the gods.  He is the God of gods, the Lord of lords.

“There is none like Him in all of the earth,” Exodus 9:14.  To say there is “no one like” God is to express uniqueness, one-of-a-kindness, and singularity.  The words “no one like” simply says there is no other god compared to, no other god on a level with, no other god equal to Jehovah, Psalms 89:6-8.  The greatness of God is not a cleverly created myth.  It comes from the crucible of experience with Him.

•  His redemptive power.  God demonstrated His irresistible might over man, Exodus 7:5,17.  He convincingly showed that Yahweh (and Yahweh alone) is the redeemer, Exodus 6:7; 10:2; 14:4,18,31; 16:6.

•  His covenant love.  The grace of Jehovah is also without comparison, Deuteronomy 7:9.  He is nearer than near to those who pray to Him, Deuteronomy 4:7.  His love no one can question.  His nearness no god can equal.

The actions of God are clues pointing to His unequivocal power and love, Micah 7:18,19.  With head held high, believers can confidently say that there is no god but God, Deuteronomy 32:39.  Indeed, there are many pretenders, but there is only one true and living God, Deuteronomy 4:39; cf. I Thessalonians 1:9; I John 5:20.

You are the one and only God.  I express my joy in knowing Your redemptive power and covenant love.  Thank You for revealing these awesome truths.  Through Him, who is the radiance of Your glory, Amen.
June 30

“*The people feared the Lord,*” *Haggai 1:12.*

Because the people were preoccupied, the temple remained in ruins, *Haggai 1:2,9.* God was not pleased. Haggai told the people to give careful thought to what they were doing, *Haggai 1:7.* They did. And, out of fear for the Lord, they began to rebuild the temple, *Haggai 1:12,14.*

Fear is a potent motivator. It is displayed in a wide range of emotions—from simple apprehension to utter terror. Fear is anxiety over an impending peril, *Jonah 1:10.* It can cause a person to cringe before a superior power, *Genesis 26:7,* or to gain an initial understanding of wisdom, *Psalms 111:10.*

- **Fear as a feeling.** Fear can result in dread, *Genesis 3:10.* The basic reason for such fright is an awareness of vulnerability. It is the realization that a perceived power can inflict harm, *Deuteronomy 5:5; 1 Samuel 28:5.* In the case of God, however, the cure for cowering is the conviction that He loves us, *Deuteronomy 20:3,4; Psalms 56:3,4.*

- **Fear as awe.** The religious sense of fear—or awe—is a reverence for God. The fear of the Lord is a recognition of His sovereignty. It is the beginning of “knowledge,” *Proverbs 1:7.* It is an understanding of Jehovah as the foundation of “a disciplined and prudent life,” *Proverbs 1:3.* To fear Him means to reject every competing deity. It means to serve the Lord only, *Deuteronomy 6:13.* Awe for God is expressed by walking in all His ways, in serving Him with an undivided heart, *Deuteronomy 10:12,13.*

- **Fear as a motive.** Fear shapes human behavior. For example, the enemies of Jesus resisted their impulse to attack Him for fear of the crowd, *Matthew 21:46.* Some who believed in Him were afraid to acknowledge Him openly, *John 7:13.* Fear is a basic motive for conforming to society. In matters relating to Jesus, a believer must overcome such fear, *Luke 12:4.* The Christian is released from the opinions of others, free to choose the Lord over everyone else.

Fear freezes obedience. Faith thaws it out.

God had summoned the people to rebuild the temple, *Haggai 1:8.* No one was coerced. No one was dragged to the construction site against his will. They came out of respect for the One who called them, *Haggai 1:14.* They willingly volunteered. Though they faced stiff opposition, they persevered, *Ezra 4:4,5.* The temple was rebuilt, *Zachariah 4:7.* When believers are aware of His power and love, they are released from the lesser terrors that get in the way, *Ezra 1:5.* Respect for the Lord trumps the fear of men.

*Almighty God, there are many pressures pushing against my faith. I am vulnerable. These forces of fear want me to be silent. Embolden my timidity. Confront me with Your awesome majesty. Make me strong for Your sake. This I pray, in Jesus name, Amen.*
Most people long to live forever. They want to do whatever it takes to get, receive, or inherit eternal life, Matthew 19:16; Mark 10:29,30; Hebrews 9:15. Thus, folks not only hope for it but also seek for it, Romans 2:7; Titus 1:1,2; 3:5b-7.

Eternal life is discovered in knowing God, John 17:3, and accepting Christ, John 3:14,15; Acts 13:48; 1 Timothy 6:12. Jesus possesses the words of eternal life, John 6:68. That life is a gift from God, John 17:2, in His Son, 1 John 5:11. It is brought to mankind by His grace and mercy, Romans 5:20,21; Jude 21. Christ, then, is synonymous with eternal life, I John 1:2; 5:20, a "life that is truly life," 1 Timothy 6:19.

• **The promise given.** Christians are promised eternal life, John 3:16. "Eternal" means more than lasting forever. The emphasis is as much on the quality as on the quantity of existence. God is eternal, 1 Timothy 1:17. Eternal life is the life of God. It is a state in which the highest part of man is in communion with the Most High.

  With Him there is joy—life free from sadness.
  With Him there is health—life devoid of disease.
  With Him there is righteousness—life without sin.
  With Him there is love—life free from hate.
  With Him there is life—life without death.

  Every negative is swallowed up. Only the positives remain. What is left is good, clean, and happy. It is beyond all expectations, an existence that surpasses the grandest dreams, 1 Corinthians 2:9. Eternal life will last forever and ever—an unending, unbroken fellowship with a perfect God in a perfect environment that will never change. He is the one who makes it happen, Jude 24,25.

• **The promise giver.** The promise of everlasting life is as stunning as it is certain, I John 2:24,25. Only the Creator of life could possibly guarantee eternal life, John 6:40; 10:27,28. His spoken promise is ample reason for hope. His pledge is confirmed by His resurrection, John 11:25,26. He is more than able to deliver on His commitment. He is alive, Hebrews 7:25. He has all authority, Matthew 28:18. He wants all believers to be with Him, John 17:24. He is Almighty, Revelation 1:8. The Lord—beyond all doubt—is completely able to make good on His pledge of everlasting life, Philippians 1:6.

No greater meaning is given to the present than knowing the future can be continual bliss. What we do today will determine where we will spend tomorrow, Revelation 20:11,12. Our destiny is waiting.

*Lord, You have placed immortality within my reach. My present burdens are the stepping stones toward eternal glory. Take my hand. I am coming home. Through Jesus, the ultimate promise-keeper, Amen.*
“They examined the Scriptures every day,” Acts 17:11.

Paul preached in Thessalonica, Acts 17:1. He used the scriptures to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, Acts 17:2,3. Some Jews and numerous Greeks believed his message, Acts 17:4. But most of his hearers did not. A riot ensued, Acts 17:5. The apostle was forced to leave.

In Berea, about forty-five miles away, he encountered a different audience, Acts 17:10,11. Instead of blind prejudice, Paul found inquisitive but honest hearers. The Bereans were “more noble,” Acts 17:11. They examined his message closely. They probed the scriptures daily, Acts 17:11. They expended much time and considerable effort in verifying the truth.

“They received the message with great eagerness,” Acts 17:11.

The word “examine” meant “to investigate.” It referred to judicial interrogation, Luke 23:14; I Corinthians 4:3; 14:24. It implied a careful inquiry into a matter before making a judgment or decision, I Corinthians 2:15. The Bereans did their homework. They gave the message of Paul a fair, unbiased hearing.

The study of scripture is not an aimless meandering through the woods. It is arduous labor, the mining of precious ore. The nobility of the Bereans to receive and investigate the scriptures for themselves is what God asks of us. Their example is worthy of our emulation.

- **Avoiding blind opposition.** There is always much to learn. No one knows everything. A different teaching may be an undiscovered truth. Resistance to anything new might be opposition to the will of God. In Thessalonica, it was jealousy that blinded the Jews, Acts 17:5. Rather than search the scriptures, they rounded up some bad folks and started a public ruckus. They lacked the decency to listen before reacting.

- **Testing new information.** Hasty opinions must give way to studied conclusions. It is the responsibility of all believers to check every teaching against the blueprint of the Bible, I John 4:1. There is no excuse for doing otherwise. God gave us His word. He expects us to study it, to judge for ourselves what is right, Luke 12:57. To do so, we must search diligently with an open mind, cf. John 5:39,40.

The scriptures are not to be left unused on a book shelf. The devil loves a dusty Bible. The word of God is light for life, Psalms 119:105. It is to be read regularly and examined carefully. It is the voice of God piercing the inner recesses of the soul. It examines us as we examine it, Hebrews 4:12.

_Father, I love Your word. I yearn to study it, to learn from it, to obey it. It is my guide, my map, my compass to heaven. May it always inform my mind, excite my spirit, and fill my soul. In Jesus Christ, my Lord, Amen._
July 3

“After that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel,” Judges 2:10.

A generation is the span of time from the birth of parents to the birth of their offspring. In the text above, “that generation” refers to the contemporaries of Joshua “who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel,” Joshua 24:31. The next generation was made up of those who did not see the exodus from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the conquest of the Promised Land. They had not witnessed these great miracles, Deuteronomy 34:10-12.

- **Faith of the fathers.** Joshua had an enormous influence on the religion of his generation. As a servant of God, a believing spy, a successor of Moses, a commander of the troops, and a conqueror of Canaan, he was the model of faithfulness, Joshua 24:14,15. His example was a steadying hand that helped a fickle people maintain their allegiance in God, Joshua 24:16. During the generation of Joshua, faith was sustained, idolatry was kept at bay, Judges 2:7. But it was a borrowed faith rather than a personal belief.

  “(They) neither knew the Lord nor what He had done for Israel,” Judges 2:10.

- **Faith of the children.** Religion is not (and cannot be) a hand-me-down from one generation to the next. Everyone must experience God for himself. The faith of the fathers is only a stimulus for achieving a similar piety in their children. Unless it is personally experienced it remains a fairy tale, a museum relic, a soft sentimentality about the religiosity of others. There is no sense of obligation to live the same way, Judges 2:17b. Spiritual longevity hangs in the balance until faith becomes a personal persuasion, Hebrews 6:1. Each generation must renew the faith, must make it their own, Jeremiah 6:16. Otherwise, religion becomes a beautiful irrelevance, an idea that no longer applies, Judges 3:7.

When Joshua and his generation died, Israel turned to other gods, Judges 2:11-13. Those who stood by the grave of their fallen leaders did not recognize how much these venerable saints meant to them. Joshua and his generation were pillars. When the pillars were removed, the cathedral of their faith collapsed. They lacked the strength to stand on their own. Spiritual dependence did not produce strong believers, Galatians 4:19,20.

It behooves all of us to examine ourselves, to find our own faith, to prove ourselves, II Corinthians 13:5. Is Christ really formed in us? Are we copying the faith of men or living in the Lord? The answer determines the path we take, the faith we hold, the perseverance we possess. When our human religious pillar is removed, will we press on undaunted by the loss? The believer who has experienced the Lord for himself will not miss a beat in his march toward the pearly gates, II Timothy 1:12.

Lord, my faith rests in You alone. The example of others is not my ticket to heaven. I want a Jesus shaped heart. Through Him, Amen.
“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life,” I Thessalonians 4:11.

The Greeks were known for their active lifestyle. They were busy, effervescent, and boisterous. Their restlessness led them to neglect their own affairs, to interfere in the lives of others. The apostle counseled calmness, I Timothy 2:1-3.

We need a quiet place to slow down the pace,
To pray and grow serene lest God slip away unseen.

The advice of Paul is a paradox. “Ambition” suggests aspiring toward a particular goal, Romans 15:20; II Corinthians 5:9. He was warning against becoming a busybody, I Thessalonians 4:11. We must not meddle in the affairs of others, I Peter 4:15.

To be “quiet” does not mean to be silent. Paul was suggesting that convictions be restrained—controlled by reason and modified by thoughtfulness—so that the saint would confine himself to his own duties. Believers are to be quiet, Psalms 131:2. The less noticed the more focused. The reasons for his admonition are clear.

- **Win respect of outsiders.** The Church has a huge responsibility. The private life of each member must win the public respect of society, I Thessalonians 4:12. Christians must do nothing inconsistent with the Gospel, Romans 13:12-14. The lowest occupation discharged with diligence exhibits the true spirit of Christ, Ephesians 6:5.

- **Live independent of everyone.** Rather than receive help, the believer gives help, Acts 20:34,35. Christians must not be freeloaders. Relying on others—except in cases of emergency—is shameful, II Thessalonians 3:6-10. Believers make their own living. They do not depend on others.

Quiet industry is a challenge. Life is filled with hurry and haste. We are summoned to calmness, to peace of mind. Multi-tasking leads to poor performance, tension, and exhaustion. We live in an insane world searching for a civil moment to retrieve our sanity. The in-box is full. The to-do-list is long. The fast lane allows no parking. God is lost in the whirl of motion. Our soul suffers malnutrition. We rebel against the silliness but continue to be silly. We talk when we should be silent, busy when we should be still.

How can we be quiet in a fast paced world? The most direct way is to listen—listen to the quietness of God. He rings no bell. He blows no trumpet. He beats no drum. He speaks in a “gentle whisper,” I Kings 19:11,12. He is like the sound of the rising sun. Unless we are quiet we will not hear Him, Psalms 46:10. If we slow down, remain calm, and wait for Him, we will discover the riches of a serene lifestyle, Ecclesiastes 4:6.

Father, I am embarrassed. I make so much noise I drown out Your quiet voice. Help me be calm. Open my ears. You alone have something worth saying. In Him, who had a quiet place, Amen.
Pharaoh Neco of Egypt had just humiliated Judah. He made her a vassal state, II Kings 23:34,35. Jeremiah announced further disaster—the ruin of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, Jeremiah 7:12-15. In a nation that had just suffered a major setback, additional bad news was not welcome, Jeremiah 26:4-6.

The religious leaders reacted immediately, Jeremiah 26:7,8. They wanted to lynch the prophet. “You must die!” they shouted. They asked “why” Jeremiah would say such terrible things. But they were not interested in his answer, Jeremiah 7:9-11.

It was generally believed that the Holy City would never be destroyed, Isaiah 11:6-9. The people placed importance on the visible at the expense of the invisible, sacrificed the kernel to save the husk. The clergy championed their perverted assumptions.

“They were saying, ‘Peace,’ when there was no peace,” Ezekiel 13:10.

Jeremiah was not to omit a single word from the message of Jehovah, Deuteronomy 4:2. It was to be delivered in its entirety. Without diminishing, taking from, doing away with, or holding back, the prophet was to state the full severity of the coming judgment, II Timothy 4:2. His task was not to tickle ears but to convict hearts, II Timothy 4:3-5.

The prophet squared his shoulders, faced his accusers, and bravely announced the oracle of God. He spoke without doubt, without hesitation. “As for me, I am in your hands,” he said. “Do with me whatever you think is good and right,” Jeremiah 26:14. His courage under fire has inspired generations of others to face stubborn opposition.

*An obligation to speak.* Jeremiah was not to “omit a word,” Jeremiah 26:2. A similar obligation rests on us today, Deuteronomy 12:32. Proclaiming truth is a trust, I Timothy 1:8-11; 6:20a. It is not to be kept a secret. The Gospel is not for private enjoyment but public announcement, Isaiah 48:17. The bread of life is for hungry souls. It must be delivered in its entirety to those who need it.

*A temptation to silence.* Fear may lead some to omit the severer elements of the message. Telling the whole truth may stir up ridicule. Therefore, Jeremiah was warned to tell it all, cf. Revelation 22:18,19. Though it is easy to skip certain truths, it is not right, I Peter 4:11a. We are required to declare the “whole will of God,” Acts 20:26,27.

Of course, discretion must be used. If possible, people should be convinced rather than provoked. Still our responsibility is to refrain from omitting a single word, Galatians 1:8,9. We are ambassadors of God, commissioned to proclaim the unaltered truth, Proverbs 30:5,6.

Lord, I am Your messenger. Regardless of the reaction of others, my concern is to tell the whole truth. I long to hear You say, “Well done!” In Jesus, my Judge, Amen.
Israel was enslaved in Egypt. They “cried out” for God to rescue them, Exodus 2:23,24. He saw their plight. He “was concerned about them,” Exodus 2:25. The Lord knew what was happening. He counted every sigh. He heard every heart break. He saw every tear.

But it had been so long! Did God really care? Did their pain mean anything to Him? “The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise as some understand slowness,” II Peter 3:9. Though He had been silent, He would soon deliver His people, Exodus 3:19,20. God was preparing the Israelites for the rigors of the desert. He “saw their misery,” Exodus 3:7.

“I have looked upon My people, for their cry has reached Me,” I Samuel 9:16.

The word “concern” meant “to visit,” Judges 15:1. A visitation of the Lord could result in punishment, Isaiah 24:22; 26:14, or blessing, Ruth 1:6; Jeremiah 15:15. The basic idea was to oversee a subordinate—for inspection, Psalms 17:3, or judgment, Psalms 89:32. Either way it changed the circumstances of the underling—for better, Zechariah 10:3, or for worse, Jeremiah 50:27. In the case of Israel, it meant to “take notice” or “show care,” Exodus 3:16; Psalms 8:4; Jeremiah 29:10.

• **The love of God.** The Lord was concerned. He performed miracles for Israel to see, Exodus 4:30. He held nothing back. He showed them that He would provide more than they needed, could imagine, or ever think to ask, Ephesians 3:20. It is no wonder “they bowed down and worshiped,” Exodus 4:31. When God visits, great things happen.

• **The impatience of Israel.** The rescue of Israel was discussed in detail with them. “Everything the Lord had said” was made known, Jeremiah 42:5; cf. II Samuel 11:22. And the people “believed,” Exodus 4:31. Unfortunately, their faith did not stand the test. Within days their confidence fell apart, Exodus 5:19-21.

Israel wanted freedom. Pharaoh stood in the way. His stubbornness seemed insurmountable. Liberty came at a cost. Their hope grew weak. They forgot that God cared, I Peter 5:7. They forgot that He was concerned. It is one thing to admire freedom. It is quite another to endure the austere conditions to obtain it.

Therein lies a lesson. The Good News sounds good. The convert rejoices in his new found faith. Yet, from the beginning of his spiritual journey, he is little aware of the long road ahead—the rigors of spiritual discipline involved. Freedom for sin is great until the challenge of dying to sin is required, Romans 6:11-13. They give up because they fail to look up. The Lord cares. At no time, however, does He intend to remove all of the obstacles from our path. The struggles remain so that faith can get its daily workout.

*Father, You care. I know You care. Otherwise, my life would not be what it is. Visit me often. I need Your grace. In Him, who is my care giver, Amen.*
“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men,” I Peter 2:13.

From the beginning of time, responding to authority has challenged human beings. For some people, it conjures up thoughts of an uncaring power. For others, it suggests a benevolent security. In either case, how should a person of faith respond?

Those in authority have the right to control the actions of others, Genesis 41:35; II Chronicles 23:18; Matthew 8:9; Acts 26:10,12. The scriptures assume that government is necessary. When referring to secular administrators, the word “authority” suggests “the power to give orders,” Luke 20:20.

The ultimate source of all authority is God, Daniel 2:37,38. He delegates power to government leaders, Romans 13:1. Christians are to obey them, Titus 3:1. One cannot accept the protections of a country without observing the laws of that country, Romans 13:5.

God ordains all governments rather than any particular form of government.

The question invariably surfaces regarding how far (and under what circumstances) should rulers be obeyed. The inquiry becomes especially important when believers are being persecuted. The inspired word allows little wiggling room, I Peter 2:16.

- **Every form of government.** Peter mentioned “every authority instituted among men,” I Peter 2:13. He stressed their human origin. Paul said, “there is no authority except that which God has established,” Romans 13:1. He emphasized their divine origin. Hence, it is argued, the apostles had certain forms of government in mind. Such a distinction is forced. All authorities should be obeyed. Their form is human. The source of their power is divine, Romans 13:2-4.

- **Every command of God.** Christians must know the boundaries of their obedience. They are to “fear God” and “honor the king,” I Peter 2:17. What happens, however, when the authorities turn against the Church? She should “submit,” I Peter 2:13,14; cf. Romans 13:6,7. A believer is to be a good citizen, Matthew 22:21. He is to pray for “all in authority,” I Timothy 2:1,2. But, when Caesar asks something that contradicts the will of heaven, the believer obeys “God rather than man,” Acts 4:19; 5:29.

“It is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God,” I Peter 2:19. Christians respect their government “for the sake of the Lord,” I Peter 2:13. They are patriots who always put God first.

Heavenly Father, I thank You for my government. Though it has shortcomings, You established it. I pray for those in authority. I honor their position. I respect their status. However, You are the King of kings. In Jesus name, Amen.
July 8

“Seek the Lord,” Zephaniah 2:3.

Jehovah was about to judge the earth. The people were worshipping idols, Zephaniah 1:4-6. The judgment was “near and coming quickly,” Zephaniah 1:14. It was going to be a day of distress, Zephaniah 1:15. If the righteous sought the Lord, there was a chance they would be sheltered from the disaster, Zephaniah 2:3; cf. Amos 5:15.

The word “seek” means “to desire, pursue, or choose” with the intention of finding or acquiring, Deuteronomy 4:29. Those who seek God should have “clean hands and a pure heart,” Psalms 24:3-6. And, when they seek Him “with all their heart,” they will find Him, Jeremiah 29:13. For “He is not far from each one of us,” Acts 17:27.

The coming doom was an avoidable event. The people were more than pawns of an impending cosmic trauma. Though human beings precipitated the dreadful situation, divine action could limit the damage.

“Seek the Lord and live,” Amos 5:6a.

- **Why should we seek God?** The approaching judgment was going to be a worldwide catastrophe, Zephaniah 1:2. There was nowhere to hide. There was no place to escape. There was no ransom to pay. The whole world would be consumed, Zephaniah 1:18. God was their only hope, Zephaniah 2:1-3. His warnings must be heeded. The dark cloud of calamity was coming, Matthew 13:41,42. The announcement of doom must be taken seriously by all who had ears to hear. It was a signal of danger. It was an invitation to repent, Isaiah 55:6,7. No one needed to wring their hands in despair.

- **How should we seek Him?** The true seeker should pursue “righteousness” and “humility,” Zephaniah 2:3b. They are the foundation of repentance. Without them, His displeasure remains. Reconciliation is withheld, Psalms 119:155. There is no other way to come before a holy God. As He is holy, so His people should be holy, I Peter 1:16. A sincere seeker should put off the old self—which is corrupted by deceitful desires—and put on the new self—which is created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness, Ephesians 4:22-24.

Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth should “be silent before the Lord,” Zephaniah 1:7. The day of doom is near. The silence is a pause for adoration, Habakkuk 2:20; Zechariah 2:13. It is a time for contemplating the grandeur of God, Psalms 46:10; cf. I Chronicles 16:10-12. It is a lull in life to wait for the mystery of His providence to be clarified, Psalms 37:7. It is a time for submission, Lamentations 3:28,29.

Lord, the voice of Your prophet speaks to me today. His words are true. The end is near. Teach me to be still. Help me find You. My security rests in Your hands. Through the One I seek, Amen.
July 9

“*I am your...reward,*” *Genesis 15:1.*

Abram was disillusioned. He was apprehensive about the future. Abram had been promised land and children, *Genesis 12:1,2; 13:14-17.* The promise remained unfulfilled. He was a wanderer without a country, an old man without offspring, *Genesis 15:2,3.* Time was moving on. His faith was being tested.

“*Surely the righteous...are rewarded,*” *Psalms 58:11.*

The Lord *“came to Abram in a vision,”* *Genesis 15:1.* The patriarch needed reassurance. God came to establish a living relationship with His servant. Abram was focused on the earthly, the here and now. His eyes did not see beyond place and personal posterity. Yet he already had far more than homestead and household. *I am your reward,*” Jehovah said, *Genesis 15:1.*

The root idea expressed in the term “reward” is “wages.” Hence, it is often translated “payment” or “compensation,” *Isaiah 40:10.* Trained soldiers were “hired” to fight battles, *II Samuel 10:6.* Skilled laborers were “hired” for construction projects, *II Chronicles 24:12.* Wise counselors were “hired” to give advice, *Ezra 4:5.* A reward was a fair return on effort expended, *Psalms 18:20; 19:11; Proverbs 11:18,31; 13:13.*

• **Discouragement.** Heroes of the faith can get down in the dumps, *Psalms 43:5.* It is human to feel that way, *Exodus 17:4; I Kings 19:10.* When hope is deferred, the heart becomes sick, *Proverbs 13:12.* The promise of God was near to the heart of Abram. The fulfillment of the promise seemed distant. Owing to the limitations of his mind and the imperfections of his heart, doubts assailed his faith, *Genesis 17:17.*

• **Comfort.** As happy as a son would make Abram, Jehovah was his reward—the adequate payment for his trust. All the energies expended, all the sacrifices made would not be sufficiently compensated by an heir. God was his comfort, *II Corinthians 1:3,4.* Saints are prone to seek happiness in the gifts of God rather than in God Himself.

• **Conviction.** The promise was renewed, *Genesis 15:4,5.* Abram believed the Lord, *Genesis 15:6.* The foundation of his faith was not the promise but the promise Giver, *Romans 4:19-21.* The promise did not make sense. It was not reasonable. Still Abram believed “*because he considered Him faithful who made the promise,*” *Hebrews 11:11.*

God is our reward for sacrifices cheerfully made, for sufferings patiently endured, *II Timothy 2:11,12a.* The Lord Himself is the reward for the weary, the well spring of solace for discouraged saints. Let us be grateful.

*Sovereign Lord, what can I say? You have given me Your Son—the true God and eternal life. He is my reward. What more do I need? Through Jesus Christ, my Lord and my God,* Amen.
“Who can understand the thunder of His power?” Job 26:14.

God is truly awesome. His “power is vast.” He “performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted,” Job 9:4,10. Who can really understand Him?

Thunder is a familiar natural phenomenon, Psalms 77:18. It is often interpreted as a visual manifestation of divine power, Isaiah 29:6; cf. I Kings 18:38. It is the voice of God, Deuteronomy 5:22; Psalms 29:3-9; John 12:28,29. The force of a thunderstorm suggests the majestic presence of the Lord, Exodus 19:16-19; Psalms 18:7-13. Wherever one goes, the sovereign power of God is there.

- **Realms below.** The people in ancient times believed the souls of the departed went to a nether world. There, under the sea, in the impenetrable darkness of the abyss, the dead confronted the Lord, Job 26:5,6. Nothing is hidden from His eyes. He is “the Lord of both the dead and the living.” Romans 14:9.

- **Realms above.** God is in the skies, too. He stretches the heavens over a broad empty space. He hangs the earth on nothing. He stores the flood waters in fluffy clouds. In a loud voice, the marvels of His creation declare the grandeur of His mighty power, Job 26:7,8; cf. Psalms 19:1; Romans 1:20.

As grand as all the wonders of the universe are, as much as folks might fathom the creation, we still barely grasp “the outer fringe of His works,” Job 26:14. The thunder of His power is barely heard by human ears. His glory and majesty for the most part remain concealed, I Corinthians 1:25.

A serious contemplation of the universe is a shortcut to the recognition of our profound ignorance. We know little. We are able to do less, I Corinthians 13:11,12. An understanding of God, as fragmentary as that is, leads to humility, to wonder, to worship. We see only the vague outline of His being. We play with a few pebbles on the shore of His infinite existence. When we have said all we know concerning Him, we set down and gaze at the depth of what lies beyond our knowledge.

“How unsearchable his judgment and His paths beyond tracing out!” Romans 11:33,34.

Still it is our privilege to gaze, to wonder, and to rejoice. If the eyes of God see the nether world, surely they observe everything on earth, II Chronicles 16:9a. If the world fits in the palm of His hand, surely I am safe in His arms. His power in nature is a mere fraction of the might of His grace. If the earth is glorious, what will heaven be? I Corinthians 2:9.

*Almighty God, I marvel at Your majesty. I know little about You. I long to meet You face to face. Till then I stand in awe at the fringes of Your works and listen to the whisper of Your power. In Him, who introduced me to You, Amen.*
July 11

“John also called Mark.” Acts 12:12.

Jesus was an example, John 13:14; I Peter 2:21. Paul was, too, I Corinthians 4:16; II Thessalonians 3:9. Timothy was urged to be an example, I Timothy 4:12.

People seldom improve when they have only themselves to follow.

The life of John Mark is an inspiring story. He was a true example. Though he apparently stumbled early in his spiritual walk, he regained his balance. Whatever he might have done, he “redeemed himself” by the end of his journey.

**His story.** The first mention of this faithful saint is a passing reference to distinguish his mother from other women named Mary, Acts 12:12. His home seemed to be a gathering place for the early Church. John Mark may have been the young man following Jesus on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, Mark 14:51.


More than a decade later, while Paul was in prison, John Mark resurfaces, Philemon 24. During his second imprisonment, Paul begs Timothy to bring John Mark “because he was helpful” to the apostle, II Timothy 4:11. Additionally, John Mark was also an important, behind-the-scenes, second team player with Peter, I Peter 5:13.

**His example.** John Mark is the author of the Gospel of Mark. Actually, according to tradition, Peter dictated the words and John Mark wrote them down. Moreover, according to tradition, he started the Church in Alexandria, Egypt. His credentials qualify him as a worthy example to follow.

John Mark was a finisher. Though called a deserter, Acts 15:38, he did not quit, Acts 15:39. He fell. He got up. He finished strong, II Timothy 4:7. He must have relied on the Holy Spirit, Colossians 1:10-12. John Mark was brave. Paul barely escaped from the mouth of the lion in Rome, II Timothy 4:17. It was a dangerous place to be. Still, when asked to come, it was the place that John Mark went, II Timothy 4:11.

Like Paul, John Mark must have relied on the Lord, II Timothy 4:18. John Mark was a worker, Acts 13:5. He was a subordinate. He took directions. He did what he was asked. His value was in following orders. Paul called him “helpful,” II Timothy 4:11. Certainly we should be like him.

*Lord, help me to play second fiddle. I want to be Your helper. May I always willingly and happily follow Your lead. Because Jesus did, Amen.*
"If I perish, I perish," Esther 4:16.

In captivity, the Jews lived a precarious existence. They were tolerated strangers in a foreign land, Esther 3:8. The king issued a decree to annihilate the Jews, Esther 3:13. Queen Esther, a Jewess, was asked to intercede, Esther 4:7,8. There was a major problem. To go uninvited before the king was considered an act of treason, Esther 4:11.

Esther faced a huge dilemma. She was literally between a rock and a hard place. Her life was in jeopardy no matter what she decided to do. After serious consideration of her options, she realized she may have become queen for the very crisis that confronted her, Esther 4:14b. She made her decision. "If I perish, I perish," she said, Esther 4:16.

Her climactic utterance is interpreted by some as a courageous surrender to the will of God. Others see her words as a despairing expression of resignation to the obvious. Both views are possible. "Perish" meant "to die," Joshua 23:16; Psalms 49:10; Jonah 4:10. The statement of Esther was a mixture of self-consideration and altruistic devotion seconded by the voice of conscience, Luke 12:48.

If I perish,  
No longer life to cherish;  
I will do my best  
And leave to You the rest.

Difficulties do not deter the faithful. When obstacles seem insurmountable, the saints start climbing. There was ample cause for Esther to move ahead, cf. Joshua 1:9.

• **She was already doomed.** "Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all Jews will escape," Esther 4:13. Her life hung in the balance, too. She was not immune to the effects of the decree. It was better for her to risk her life (to prevent a dreadful blood bath) than meekly allow others to take her life (for devious reasons).

• **Rescue was inevitable.** "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place," Esther 4:14a. Quiet faith in divine providence strengthens timid resolve. God would deliver His people. Esther could opt to be the instrument of that rescue. The Lord does not depend on any one person. He chooses those who trust Him. Like Jacob, Esther put her faith in God Almighty, Genesis 43:14.

Esther acknowledged the force of circumstances. She could not resist it. This was her hour, her time to mold history, to change the course of human destiny. Her choice was the result of careful thought, Esther 4:16. She made her sacrifice in the spirit of Christ: *Not My will, but Yours be done," Luke 22:42*. We should go and do likewise.

Father, in every life there are moments upon which history hangs. I am here to make a difference. Help me fulfill my destiny. In Him, who rescued me, Amen.
“Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again,” Ecclesiastes 11:1.

There are uncertainties in life, contingencies to which all effort is subject. This is true for acts of charity, investments in business, and work on the farm. There is much that man does not know, that is beyond his ability to predict, Ecclesiastes 11:5. Hence, a warning is issued against excessive hesitation, Ecclesiastes 11:4, 6.

We are not asked to “throw caution to the wind.” There is a place for prudent observation of the weather, careful analysis of the stock market, and wise disbursement of alms. But cause and effect is often beyond human knowledge, beyond the control of human choice, Ecclesiastes 11:3. No one ought to abstain from new ventures because of endless calculations about the unpredictable variables involved.

• **The prescription.** “What is good for man in life?” Ecclesiastes 6:12. A noble, unselfish generosity is prescribed, Ecclesiastes 11:1. Unlike those who “tear down their barns” in order to keep everything for themselves, Luke 12:18, the generous person will “love his neighbor as himself,” Romans 13:9; James 2:8. He will share with others in spite of not knowing what the future has in store, Ecclesiastes 11:2. He does good “without expecting to get anything back,” Luke 6:35. Like bread that sinks when cast upon water, so his kindness may be forgotten. Still the giver is blessed by his giving, Acts 20:35.

• **The promise.** Philanthropy has its risks. However, “after many days,” it has its rewards. The harvest ripens months after the seed is sown. Investments make money over the long haul. Charity is rewarded in due time, Matthew 25:40. It sounds like refined selfishness—giving to others so that others will give to you, Luke 6:38. Is not that idea reflected in the Golden Rule, Matthew 7:12? God promises that “those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy,” Psalms 126:5. He does not allow our efforts to go unnoticed. The good we do bears fruit through the operation of His providence.

“Therefore...stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain,” 1 Corinthians 15:58.

This is the will of God. Do not be afraid to show kindness, even where there seems to be no prospect of return. It is true wisdom. Pleasures may bloom and fade. Riches may come and go. The favor of men may be given and taken away. In the midst of such instability, we should make it our chief aim “not to become weary in doing well, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up,” Galatians 6:9, 10. We should cultivate a positive attitude, Proverbs 10:28, and refrain from worrying about tomorrow, Matthew 6:34.

Lord, help me cast my bread without considering where it will land or what I will get in return. In Him, who gave unselfishly, Amen.
Modern society considers itself well informed. Our schools speak of our yearning for learning. Hence, some would say, the words of the prophet do not apply today. But wait! Knowledge to us means secular information. The prophet was referring to spiritual insight, Proverbs 10:21. His words do apply. Our nation is ripe for destruction.

“(They) do not know...do not understand.” Isaiah 1:3.

The messengers of God proclaimed the instructions of heaven. “This is the way; walk in it,” they said, Isaiah 30:21. The people were informed but they were disobedient, Romans 7:15. The disconnect between knowing and doing was the problem, Isaiah 1:4.

In the Old Testament, knowledge indicated a relationship with God. Judges 2:10; Jeremiah 10:25. Israel was advised “to seek” Him, Deuteronomy 4:29; 1 Chronicles 16:11; Psalms 9:10. They were to comprehend who He was. They were to live as He instructed, Psalms 25:8-10. What happened? Why did Israel fail?

- **Lack of knowledge.** Israel had known the Lord. She had seen His miracles. She had experienced His power. Somewhere, in her journey, however, she let it slip away. Now there was no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God, Hosea 4:1. Destrue of spirituality, the people sank into moral decay, Hosea 4:2,3. They were completely submerged in the polluted environment of secular society. And, what was most damaging, they did not seem to know it, Hosea 4:14.

- **Cause of ignorance.** God was not at fault. He had revealed His will, Hosea 8:12. The parents were charged with instructing their children, Deuteronomy 6:6,7; Psalms 78:1-7. The priests were to teach the parents. If everyone did their responsibility, all would be well. But the priests failed, Malachi 2:7,8. The parents failed, too. The knowledge of God was lost, Romans 1:21,28. The Lord condemned both the priests and the parents, Hosea 4:9. And finger pointing would not change a thing, Hosea 4:4.

With heaviness of heart, God pronounced their doom. He rejected those who rejected Him, Revelation 2:5. The people destroyed themselves. They refused to listen. Their stubbornness led to their demise, Hosea 4:16.

Sin is its own avenger. Social freedom leads to spiritual slavery. Pampered appetites become cruel tormentors. When the devil wishes to destroy, he first intoxicates the mind with the pleasures of disobedience. The delusion of unrighteousness takes over. The judgment of God is not far behind. Let us beware!

_Holy Father, righteous Lord, my disposition determines my destiny. I am responsible. It is within my power to destroy myself. Keep me from being foolish. I cannot succeed in life on my own. In Him, who saves, Amen._
July 15

“When you give a luncheon...do not invite your friends,” Luke 14:12.

Hospitality was a sacred obligation, Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2; I Peter 4:9. The entertaining of strangers was an important custom, Judges 19:10-21. Christ received such kindness on numerous occasions, Luke 10:38; 14:1; 19:5.

The practice of hospitality developed when motels were a rarity, Genesis 18:1-8; 19:1-3. Guests were treated with respect. Their animals were given food and water. The traveler was provided with a sumptuous feast and overnight lodging, Genesis 24:17-25. Hospitality was as much a gesture of protection as it was an act of generosity.

Jesus was dependent on hospitality, Matthew 8:20. As a traveling rabbi, He was often a dinner guest, Matthew 9:10; Mark 14:3; Luke 7:36; John 12:2. Such hospitality was assumed in the sending of the apostles, Matthew 10:9,10; Luke 10:5-7. It was a prominent factor in early missionary activity, Acts 16:15; 18:27; III John 5-8.

During one of these times of hospitality, Jesus startled His host, Luke 14:12-14. He appeared to rebuke his kindness (though that is probably a misreading of His words). Jesus was not condemning the hospitality of His host but examining the motive behind it.

- **A common flaw.** The Lord did not forbid inviting friends to a meal. In view of eternity, however, He was suggesting selfless hospitality. People invite their own circle of acquaintances with full anticipation of a similar invitation in return. Guest lists were shaped by including those who could repay—the opposite of no-strings-attached giving. Jesus was rebuking selfishness disguised as generosity.

- **A noble act.** People are blessed when they entertain those who cannot pay them back. Hospitality must not be an investment which brings a return. It should be a gift which blesses others. God loves all men—the high and the low, Psalms 36:7-9. He asked us to remember the poor, Deuteronomy 15:11; Galatians 2:10. “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord.” God will reward him for what he has done, Proverbs 19:17. A sign of genuine maturity is disinterested (in self) benevolence, Matthew 5:46-48.

“*The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve,*” Mark 10:45.

It is rare to do something for nothing. Some folks would say it is impossible. Perhaps, then, the virtue of giving hospitality should be measured by where the reward is sought and when the reward is expected. If we seek recompense now, we have our reward. It is far more noble to do good and wait until the “resurrection of the righteous” to be repaid, Luke 14:14. We should honor God rather than please men, I Thessalonians 2:4.

*Lord, the more I want to be free of me, the more I seem to be filled with myself. The process of emptying is enormously difficult. Show me how to do it. I want to be selfless like Jesus. In Him, Amen.*

“What more could have been done for my vineyard?” God asked, Isaiah 5:4. His vineyard was “the house of Israel, the men of Judah,” Isaiah 5:7. The Lord loved His people, lavished tender care on them, Isaiah 5:1,2. He expected a harvest of righteousness but found sin. Therefore, God threatened to punish them, Isaiah 5:5,6.

The people foolishly mocked the seriousness of the Lord. “Let God hurry, let Him hasten His work so that we may see it,” they said, Isaiah 5:19. Their words were defiant disbelief in full bloom, Isaiah 28:14,15; Jeremiah 5:12; 17:15; Amos 5:18-20. Sinners who jeer at the approach of calamity make the disaster worse, Isaiah 28:22. Little did they consider that


Israel was taunting Jehovah. His judgment was speeding toward its fulfillment. The people remained unmoved, Ezekiel 12:22,23. Woe to those who doubt the word of heaven, Ezekiel 12:26-28. Sin has a way of blinding the sinner.

• Vain thoughts. The people dreamed of banishing the effect of evil while actually bringing it closer, Amos 6:3. They said, “Disaster will not overtake us,” Amos 9:10. Willful minds hold deep beliefs in the power of words. Yet mere words have no magic in them. We can rail at the thunder clouds but it will still rain. We can shake our fists at the tide but it will still roll in. We can defy God but He will keep His word, II Peter 1:19.

• Distorted ideas. One cannot wish away the mischief of wickedness. Though called by a different name, sin is still sin. Why gloss over wrong as if it was right? Why call darkness light? Why claim that bitterness is sweet? Isaiah 5:20. Such verbal cleverness is a shortcut to ruin, Isaiah 5:21. The damage of such twisted thinking is serious, Isaiah 22:14. The habit of false thinking disables the mind. Truth is eclipsed. Human reasoning is crippled. Men wallow in degrading pleasures, Isaiah 5:22,23. The end is near, Isaiah 5:24,25.

Six times the prophet said, “Woe to them!” In their shameless arrogance, the people invited the Lord to “bring on” their punishment. The evil of their minds knew no limits, Psalms 73:7. They swaggered in pride—thinking God had no knowledge, Psalms 73:11. Yet suddenly they were destroyed, completely swept away by terrors, Psalms 73:19. When He makes good on His warnings, human bravado will appear so silly, so fruitless, and so empty.

Remind me, Lord, I am but dust—a mere speck in a vast universe. Pride is silly. Arrogance is sin. Only Your grace gives me value. Thanks for that amazing gift. I humbly pray, through Jesus, my Master and my Friend, Amen.
July 17

“What is good for man in this life?” Ecclesiastes 6:12.

Everyone will die. Many wish it was soon, Ecclesiastes 6:3-6. Yet life has purpose. There is good reason to live--if we choose what is “better.”

- **Good reputation**, Ecclesiastes 7:1. It is always “better” to have a respected name, Proverbs 22:1. It is more pleasant than the sweet scent of perfume. It opens doors of opportunity that would otherwise remain closed. To gain a good reputation one must be what he desires others to think he is.

- **Sober thought**, Ecclesiastes 7:2. It is “better” to attend a funeral than a party. Why? A funeral causes a person to reflect on the brevity of life, to number his days, Psalms 90:12. Excessive celebration obscures the inevitable. It steers the mind away from God, Isaiah 5:11,12. Frivolous, profane, and irreligious merrymaking should be avoided. Life is too short to sing the song of fools, Ecclesiastes 7:3,4.

- **Righteous living**, Ecclesiastes 7:5-7. The quiet lessons of sober thought are supplemented by the rebuke of the wise, Proverbs 13:1; 17:10. It is “better” to seek happiness in the right places. The pursuit of wanton behavior is temporary—like the brief, noisy burning of nettles that quickly turn to ashes. The reveler is left with a painful hang over, a stained conscience, and a wounded heart. It is common knowledge that a night of laughter is not worth a lifetime of regret, Job 20:4,5.

- **Patient anticipation**, Ecclesiastes 7:8,9. The end of a matter is “better” than its beginning because the outcome is known. Hence, patience (waiting for the conclusion) is better than resentment (prematurely judging the outcome). Impatience can lead to a preoccupation with the past, Ecclesiastes 7:10. Anger over unanticipated results is unnecessary and counterproductive. Providence may be slow but it can be trusted. Give it time. God is in charge, Romans 8:28.

- **True wisdom**, Ecclesiastes 7:11,12. Hasty judgment is incompatible with real wisdom. And, in the end, wealth, for all of its advantages, will not sustain life. Therefore, it is “better” to find wisdom, Proverbs 3:13-18. Wisdom braces the soul. It affirms that life is shaped by God. Human existence is not at the mercy of fate. So the wise do not dissipate their strength trying to undo what the Lord has done. Life is not to be fixed but to be enjoyed, Ecclesiastes 7:13,14.

We cannot change the designs of God but can live upright within the good and evil of our time. The former should give us joy. The latter should evoke caution. We do not know the future but we know who does. Thus, we avoid the extremes of intemperance and indifference, Ecclesiastes 7:15-18. He has shown us a better way. Let us walk in it.

*Father, You are in the driver’s seat. I am along for the ride. Come what may, You will be my compass till the end. In Him, who shows me what is better, Amen.*
“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess,” Hebrews 10:23.

The world bravely hopes for the best. It approaches life as a lottery looking for better luck next time. It encourages trust in chance, the wish of an idle dreamer. In the end, it is a heartless taunt that has no comfort, no assurance, and no confidence in the future.

The struggling doubter asks,
“Does hope have a reason?”
The dying martyr knows
There is a reward in due season!


- **Profession of hope.** Confessing a confidence in Christ is obligatory, Matthew 10:32,33; Romans 10:9,10; I John 4:15. Professions of hope are tested by persecution, Hebrews 10:32-34. They are imperiled by the temptations of satan, by the distractions of the carnal nature, Galatians 5:19-21. The voice of faith can be muted. Perseverance is required. When the course is finished and the faith is kept, we “will receive what He has promised,” Hebrews 10:36. There must be no uncertainty, no timidity, no wavering in our acknowledgement of Jesus Christ, Revelation 3:11.

- **Encouragement of hope.** He who promises is faithful, Hebrews 10:23; cf. I Corinthians 1:9; I Thessalonians 5:24. Whether He offers forgiveness of sins, Isaiah 1:18, earthly provisions, Matthew 6:33; Philippians 4:19, or rest, Matthew 11:28,29, God will keep His word. We may falter but He will not fail. It is our fault if we lose hope. His faithfulness is a sufficient motive for remaining faithful. “So do not throw away your confidence, it will be richly rewarded,” Hebrews 10:35.

The promises of God are reliable. When He vows to do something, He knows everything that might stand in the way of its accomplishment. He is not taken off guard, left unable to keep His word. God does not lie. He does not change His mind, Numbers 23:19; I Samuel 15:29. He has the power to bring His promises to pass, Isaiah 24:1-3. “The Lord has spoken.”

Some profess their faith in the obscurity of night, John 3:2. Though, perhaps, excusable at first, such profession cannot be maintained over the long haul. It will either come into the light or die in the dark. The believer must fight the good fight of faith in the presence of many witnesses, I Timothy 6:12. He must “imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what is promised,” Hebrews 6:11,12.

*Lord, I trust in Your promises. You are my reason for hope, my encouragement to believe. May I never outlive my confidence in You, my Hope. Let it be so.*
“Little by little,” Deuteronomy 7:22.

War is a series of battles—some are won and some are lost. Victory is not immediate. Success comes to those who endure. The price is high. Casualties mount as the fighting continues. The final triumph goes to those who are faithful to the end.

Physical and spiritual warfare are similar. Combat with the forces of evil is real, intense, and exhausting. The conquest of the Promised Land illustrates the hostilities in the “heavenly realms,” Ephesians 6:10-12. The conflict is long, slow, and intentional.

• **Long.** “I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous,” Exodus 23:29. In unoccupied territory, beasts of prey can gain the upper hand, Leviticus 26:22; Ezekiel 14:15. It actually occurred during the exile, II Kings 17:24-26. Thus, Israel was given time to consolidate, organize, and secure her victories as she went along. The same is true for the believer. The initial rescue from sin must be followed by years of effort to sanctify the heart. Otherwise evil will return with reinforcements, Luke 11:24-26. The final condition is much worse than the first.

• **Slow.** “The Lord God will drive out (the enemy) little by little,” Exodus 23:30; Deuteronomy 7:22. Instead of expelling the foe with one sudden, overwhelming blow, God implemented a gradual takeover. Likely Israel would have preferred a quick, decisive win. The Lord had a better idea. He still uses the gradual approach for removing evil. He drives out bad little by little so that good can take its place little by little. He does not want us to become lazy. We inherit what is promised through faith and patience, Hebrews 6:12. Obstacles are designed to test (not defeat) resolve. In due time, the trophy is won, Joshua 21:45.

• **Intentional.** God did not drive the enemy out all at once. Some were left to test Israel, to see whether they would keep the way of the Lord, Judges 2:22,23. Without challenges, commitment becomes soft. An unexercised belief becomes a flabby faith, Hebrews 5:13,14. It is a dangerous expedient. Living in the midst of evil can strengthen or weaken an allegiance to the Lord. It is a calculated risk taken by a wise God to nurture His people, Deuteronomy 8:2; Judges 3:1. The faithful look back and acknowledge their indebtedness to the stress of the journey and the burdens along the way, Hebrews 12:11.

Conquering sin is a daunting task. Temptation is a persistent enemy. At times, the battle seems hopeless, Romans 7:21-23. Still the child of God presses forward. Faith is the victory, I John 5:3,4. God does not give crowns without conflicts. He expects them to be won little by little. Endurance is required. Success is guaranteed, Romans 8:32.

_You know what is best, Lord. Though the way home seems long and slow, it is intentional. In spite of the rigors of the march, I resolve to be faithful to the end. In Him, who has been there and done that, Amen._
“You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth,” II Kings 19:15.

Religion is often a mindless routine, Isaiah 29:13. It is ho hum worship wrapped in tradition—a boring, repetitive, mechanical observance of empty ceremony. It lacks a personal, vital, living, inward experience with God.

All of that can change when a crisis comes. The worshipper is thrown to his knees. In desperation, he casts himself on the mercy of God. The Lord becomes real. Religion gains a deeper significance. God is suddenly perceived in a new way, Job 42:5.


• **A spiritual insight.** Human history is controlled by the sovereign power of Jehovah. He alone is “God over all the kingdoms of the earth,” II Kings 19:15. He rules the nations. He governs the affairs of men. He is not a worthless piece of wood, a god crafted by human hands, Isaiah 2:8; Jeremiah 2:5. He is the only God who influences the world, Jeremiah 14:22. Jehovah alone is God—unique in wisdom, majesty, and power. He is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, Isaiah 44:7,8; 45:21,22; 46:8-11.

Why should men turn to “gods that are not gods?” Jeremiah 2:11; 5:7. “The Lord is God; besides Him there is no other,” Deuteronomy 4:35-37. This is not a theory. It is a fact—a fact based on what He has done in history, Deuteronomy 4:32-34.

“I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from Me there is no God,” Isaiah 45:5.

The problem of pretending worshippers still exists. There is plenty of outward religion but little inward spirituality. Worship with the lips without conviction in the heart is unacceptable, Psalms 78:36,37; Ezekiel 33:31. It offends God, Mark 7:6-8.

Magnificent cathedrals echoing beautiful hymns can still be a vain mockery. The form is present. The substance is absent. The kernel is lost. The husk is left. When personal piety is abandoned, superficial ritual takes its place. Does the Lord not notice? “Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart,” I Samuel 16:7. And, should He look at our heart, what would He find?

*Sovereign Lord, I am humbled by Your majesty, overwhelmed by Your grandeur. I promise to worship You in spirit and truth. You deserve nothing less. Because He told me so, Amen.*
“We are God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do,” Ephesians 2:10.

“God created the heavens and the earth,” Genesis 1:1. He also made humans, Genesis 1:27. God put man “in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it,” Genesis 2:15. Such was the generosity of divine grace.

With the help of satan, the original plan went terribly awry. Disobedience destroyed the innocence of the pristine world. Man was caught in the grip of sin. He became the “object of wrath,” Ephesians 2:3. Moved by a boundless love, God restored order out of the chaos, Ephesians 2:4,5. Such was the generosity of divine grace.

In both creation and redemption, man is the benefactor of the power and goodness of God. Nothing was earned. Everything was given. Man has no reason to boast. God did it all, Ephesians 2:8,9. The Lord designed life, Ephesians 2:10. Man should follow the blueprint.

“And as for you, brother, never tire of doing what is right,” II Thessalonians 3:13.

- **Created by God.** The Lord is the Creator. We are the creature—something made by Him. We did not make ourselves, Psalms 100:3. Where there was no life, the Lord brought life into being, II Corinthians 5:17,18. Every believer now has spiritual life that Christ brought to “light through the Gospel,” II Timothy 1:10. We did nothing to create, earn, or make it happen, II Timothy 1:9. We can take no credit for it. An apple tree is made to bear apples. Once it has produced apples, however, the fruit cannot claim that it produced the tree! Likewise, as we did not create ourselves, so our works do not produce our salvation. The grace of God alone procured our redemption, Titus 2:11.

- **Created to work.** As surely as the Lord made us, He created us “to do good works.” Salvation is a trumpet call to service. No believer should be idle. Every child of God has work to do, James 2:14. Christians are to bear fruit, John 15:8. The sun was created to shine. Birds were made to fly. The flower was created to blossom. We were made to work. A barren branch is pruned. The barren tree is cut down, Matthew 7:19. So idle saints are urged to get busy, II Thessalonians 3:11,12.

Work is part of the advance planning of the Lord. While God saves no one because of his work, He saves everyone so that they may work, I Corinthians 15:58. In other words, good deeds are the fruit not the root of salvation, James 2:18. Each of us has a calling fixed by the wise counsel of God. Our task is to discover His assignment, to do His will. He opens the doors, supplies the strength, leads the way, and cheers us on. What we do to others we do to Him, Matthew 25:40. Such is the generosity of divine grace.

Father in heaven, help me know my job. Give me strength to do my work. I seek no reward, want no recognition. I wish to reflect Your design, to fulfill Your purpose. With that I am content. I pray, in the name of my Creator, Amen.
July 22

“I’m disgusted with living.” Genesis 27:46.

Every parent knows the great joy and deep sorrow of children, Proverbs 10:1. There is no crown more cherished, no dream more coveted than a wise son, Proverbs 23:25. Equally, when kids make foolish decisions, there is no greater pain, Proverbs 17:25.

Esau was foolish. He twittered away his future for a measly meal, Genesis 25:29-34. His physical gratification was more important. No consideration of consequences was entertained. His appetite took over. His actions issued a warning.

Beware of any desire which prefers happiness more than honor, cf. Hebrews 12:16.

Esau was a thoroughly profane person. His marriages to foreign women were a bitter trial to his dad and mom. They spent many anxious days and sleepless nights worrying over their wayward son. Clearly this child brought heaviness to his parents.

• Disappointment. The wives of Esau “were a source of grief,” Genesis 26:35. They were Hittites. The Hittites were one of many alien tribes that lived in Canaan. Thus, they were called Canaanites. Isaac and Rebekah, the parents of Esau, disapproved of marriage to Canaanites, Genesis 28:1. Their presence in the family caused friction, a bitterness of spirit, an opposition to the will of God.

• Disgust. Rebekah was deeply disturbed. Would her other son marry a Hittite, too? She loathed the prospect of more foreign women in the family. “I am disgusted with living,” she said, Genesis 27:46. God employed the same word to describe His “abhorrence” for the Canaanites, Leviticus 20:23. Likewise, Israel “detested” the manna, Numbers 21:5. The term implied an overwhelming repulsion, Exodus 1:12; Numbers 22:3; I Kings 11:25. Esau had broken the heart of his mother.

• Displeasure. Eventually Esau “realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father,” Genesis 28:8. Nevertheless, he rashly ignored the instruction of his dad and mom, Proverbs 6:20-24. His arrogance crushed the spirit of his parents, Proverbs 18:14. In an effort to fix his former mistakes, Esau married another wife—the granddaughter of Abraham, the daughter of Ishmael, Genesis 28:9. Yet rash action rarely mends broken fences. The Ishmaelites were as hostile as the Hittites toward the Israelites, Genesis 25:18. Esau merely compounded the problem.

It is impossible to estimate the influence children have on their father and mother. “None of us lives to himself,” Romans 14:7. Unfortunately, children are the last to realize it. Gross selfishness results in blind indifference toward those who love them most. Does this not also apply to our relationship with God?

Heavenly Father, my rebellious heart hurts others. My actions give You heartburn. Forgive me for disappointing, disgusting, and displeasing You. In His name, Amen.
King Hezekiah was a good man. He was an outstanding leader. “There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah,” II Kings 18:5. His “acts of devotion” were a matter of public record, II Chronicles 32:32. But Hezekiah made a mistake. One blemish was found on his resume’. One offense tarnished his sterling career. Pride was his nemesis, II Chronicles 32:24-26. Though he repented, the vanity of his self-importance remained.

Pride never rides in the back seat.

**His flaw.** Everyone has an imperfection. Such is part of the human condition, Matthew 26:41. Hezekiah was vulnerable. “God had given him very great riches,” II Chronicles 32:27-29. The king “succeeded in everything,” II Chronicles 32:30. Foreign nations became curious. They sent envoys to ask about the outpouring of divine providence. Hezekiah “gladly” received his visitors. He gave them a royal tour, showed them “everything” in his kingdom, Isaiah 39:2. Pride took center stage, Proverbs 16:18.

**His mistake.** The blessings of heaven became a curse. Though designed for good, they resulted in evil. The envoys brought a gift from Babylon, Isaiah 39:1. Flattery wrapped in congratulations stroked the ego of a good man. Satan saw an opening. He took advantage. Hezekiah fell. Did he not know ego dressed in pride would lead to error? How could he be so stupid? Hezekiah was thinking of himself, II Kings 20:16-19.


The Lord did not warn the king of His impending departure. God was under no obligation to do so. Hezekiah was given common sense. He was enlightened by revealed truth. Prayer was available. Yet Hezekiah failed. Pride took over. The king proceeded on alone.

Jehovah left so that Hezekiah could know what was really in his heart. His “heart” was the inner stage upon which the unrehearsed drama of his spiritual life played out, Deuteronomy 30:6; I Kings 8:58; Jeremiah 32:39; Ezekiel 11:19. God knew the heart of the king, I Kings 8:39; Psalms 139:1-4; Jeremiah 17:10; Luke 16:15. God left so Hezekiah could see himself for who he really was.

The Lord still leaves His children from time to time. It is all part of our spiritual maturation. However, like Hezekiah, we do not seem to notice His departure. And, when we live without Him, we have no problem enduring His absence. Therein is the lesson.

*Lord, I fear You have left me more than once. It is painful to confess that I did not notice. How could I be so self-centered? In Him, who felt forsaken, Amen.*
July 24

“Those who have served will gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith,” I Timothy 3:13.

From time to time, those who serve need encouragement. This text is a pat-on-the-back for all who minister, who care for the needs of others, Matthew 20:28; John 12:2; II Timothy 1:18; I Peter 4:11. If one is in the trenches, languishing in the back waters of some quiet, behind-the-scenes ministry, this message is addressed to you.

Paul gives encouraging words to everyone who serves well. To excellent work comes the recognition of excellence. It is not unbecoming to offer incentives to do a good job, Matthew 19:29; II Timothy 4:7,8; Hebrews 12:2; Revelation 2:7,10,17,26-28; 3:5,6,12,13,21. Neither is it wrong to anticipate a reward for noble work done—even one plans to use the reward for the glory of God and the good of others, Psalms 58:11; Matthew 10:42; 16:27; I Corinthians 3:8,14; Hebrews 10:35; II John 8. The reward is twofold.

- **Excellent standing.** Those who serve faithfully gain a good reputation. The congregation thinks highly of them. The term “standing” can also refer to a “step” on a sundial, II Kings 20:9,10. Hence, those who serve will take a step forward. They have tangible proof that they are making steady progress in their spiritual journey. Each step becomes a steppingstone—a reward and an encouragement.

- **Great assurance.** Those who serve faithfully also gain a solid confidence. They move beyond timidity. Their faith is real. Their behavior is bold, Mark 8:32; Acts 4:13; 13:46. This is not self-confidence but confidence in God, II Corinthians 3:4. It is an encouraging insight. It is a calm assurance nurtured by the calluses of ministry. It is the certainty that one is on the correct path, headed in the right direction.

  “Therefore, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain,” II Corinthians 15:58.

Christian living is a challenge. As believers move forward, they meet opposition. Their faith is tested. Those who have served well do not falter. Soldiers of the cross boldly stand in full confidence. They know whom they have believed. They are convinced that He is able to guard what has been entrusted to Him, II Timothy 1:12.

A happy, growing sense of conviction is available to every saint. It is nurtured in a faith community. It is confirmed in kingdom service. There may be doubt among the spectators. There is little guessing on the playing field, Romans 12:1,2.

  *Father, confirm my faith as I serve You. The rigors of ministry testify to the truth of Your will. May I gladly accept the great prize—the assurance of faith.* In Jesus Christ, Amen.
July 25

“The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord,” Joshua 9:14.

Deceit has played a major role in history. Strong armies have been conquered by lies. Noble causes have been unraveled by falsehood. Countless good men have been destroyed by fraud. The child of God must be careful.


**Strategy of Gibeon.** The inhabitants of Canaan had heard about the power of God at the Red Sea. They had been told of the defeat of two powerful kings in their neighborhood. Their hearts “melted,” Joshua 2:8-11. What should they do? How should they deal with the advance of Israel into their territory? Most of the people decided to fight the intruders. For, they realized, Israel was not invincible. Had they not been defeated at Ai? Joshua 7:3-5. However, the village of Gibeon opted for a different strategy. They sought by deception to make a treaty with their opponents, Joshua 9:1-4a.

Give the devil your ear and he will take your soul.

Sometimes satan makes bold, frontal attacks, I Peter 5:8,9. Other times he sneaks up behind us. Either way, he is up to no good. Deception is his favorite tactic. He delights in leading the gullible astray. The saint must be on guard, I Corinthians 6:9,10; 15:33,34; Galatians 6:7.

**Mistake of Israel.** Joshua saw the worn out sacks and the old wineskins. He “sampled” their moldy bread. The Gibeonites said they had traveled a long distance, Joshua 9:6. Did not these physical items prove the truthfulness of their words? Joshua hesitated. After all Israel was not to make a treaty with any of the inhabitants of the land, Exodus 23:32; 34:12; Deuteronomy 7:2. The things that Joshua saw, touched, and tasted were what they were. The error resided in the conclusions drawn from them.

Caution is always required in deciding the significance of physical evidence for spiritual phenomenon. In haste, Israel believed a lie. They did not ask God, Joshua 9:14. We are vulnerable to make the same mistake, II Thessalonians 2:9-12. Joshua had been told to rely on the Lord, Numbers 27:18-21. In the case of the Gibeonites, God was ignored. Perhaps, Joshua assumed the matter was insignificant. But how (and by whom) is significance decided? We must “commit to the Lord” whatever we do, Proverbs 16:3.

Lies never last, Proverbs 12:19. The ruse of the Gibeonites was unmasked three days later, Joshua 9:16. God was gracious. He took the silly mistake of Joshua and turned it into a lesson of humility, watchfulness, and dependence. Every folly can be the foundation of true wisdom. It can teach us valuable truth if we are willing to be taught. God help us.

*Your grace gives me hope. In spite of my blunders, You forgive. Rescue me from deception. May I always rely on You. In Your Son, I pray, Amen.*
Believers are urged to “be strong,” I Corinthians 16:13. But, because their difficulties are often overwhelming, they wonder if that is possible. Their strength is clearly inadequate. How can they endure against such odds?

The faithful are asked to be strong “in the Lord and in His mighty power,” Ephesians 6:10. They are to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus,” II Timothy 2:1. When abiding in Him, the followers of God will stand firm. They will be ready when the evil day comes, Ephesians 6:13-15.

• **Day of adversity.** Struggles cannot be avoided. They are part and parcel of life. Ships must endure storms. Pioneers must overcome danger. Lamps must shine in darkness. What value is a boat that is not seaworthy? What good is an adventurer that retreats from adversity? What advantage is a lantern that goes out in the dark? Seasons of affliction will test our strength. Idle pretenses and empty boasts (about being brave) are folly. They bring disaster on all who trust in them, Matthew 12:36.

• **Time of testing.** When the sky is clear, when the wind is calm, it is easy to move forward. When blessed by prosperity, when surrounded by friends, it is easy to be optimistic. It takes little effort to row downstream, to run with a tailwind. But the measure of strength is how one faces trouble, Proverbs 24:10. Do we whine or complain? Those who trust in God are armed with the strength of God, Psalms 18:32; 29:11. Though we may falter in time of difficulty, He will renew our strength. Then we can run and not grow weary, walk and not be faint, Isaiah 40:30,31. This is strength perfected in weakness, II Corinthians 12:9.

• **Possibility of fatigue.** There is no guilt incurred from becoming tired. We cannot escape it. While laboring in the flesh, we will be plagued by the limitations of the flesh. This is to be expected. The soldier of Christ is like the army of Gideon: “exhausted yet keeping up the pursuit,” Judges 8:4. Guilt comes when we “throw in the towel,” when we let the enemy win. That need not be the outcome. The Lord has promised us ample resources to secure the victory.

“**We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us,”** Romans 8:37.

He has both the wisdom and the power to help us navigate through every storm, I Corinthians 1:25. He will turn our darkness into light, Psalms 18:28, our weeping into joy, Psalms 30:5. We may fall. But God will raise us up, Proverbs 24:16. To every distressed soul, the Lord is a refuge, Psalms 9:9. Trust Him. He is our strength in troubled times, Psalms 28:7-9.

*Father, I cannot get through life by myself. Take my hand. Give me strength for the journey. Lead the way. This I beg, in Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Those who “wait” actually look or long with eager anticipation. Waiting is a sign of faith, Genesis 49:18, and of hope, Psalms 130:5. In spite of delays, God keeps His promises. No one who waits for Him will regret it, Psalms 37:34; Isaiah 49:23.

Waiting for God implies a need, Psalms 123:1,2. It suggests He is sufficient to satisfy our need, Psalms 62:5.

“Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord,” Psalms 27:14.

God frames the parameters of life. He is the centerpiece of existence. All revolves around Him, Psalms 130:5,6. Faith is not a passing sentiment, an occasional remembrance. The believer “waits for God always,” Hosea 12:6.

• **Purpose of waiting.** There is good reason to wait for God. He gives us food in due season, Psalms 104:27; 145:15. He is the giver of every good and perfect gift, James 1:17. Our hope rests on Him, Jeremiah 14:22. We cannot save ourselves. Salvation comes from above, Isaiah 25:9. He is the God of mercy, the Lord of grace. There is good reason, then, to wait on Him, Psalms 39:7.

• **Practice of waiting.** We wait on the Lord in faith. He rewards those “who earnestly seek Him,” Hebrews 11:6. We wait on the Lord with patience. For perseverance produces character, character produces hope—a hope that is not disappointed, Romans 5:3-5. We wait on Him with resignation. “He is the Lord; let Him do what is good in His eyes,” I Samuel 3:18. We wait on Him always. Rather than sporadically, we wait on Him continually. We wait on Him in every situation, everywhere, at all times, Lamentations 3:24.

It is not for us to dictate when, how, or where God should intervene. His wisdom must not be questioned nor His goodness impugned. Weariness in waiting is dangerous. We should remain alert, watchful, and expectant. He will move at the appropriate time.

As long as we are alive, there is something for which to wait, Proverbs 23:18. God is the source of our perpetual longing. He has promised us a future. He gives us hope, Jeremiah 29:11. The wicked have no assurance of a sweet by-and-by, Proverbs 10:28. They have no purpose for waiting. What they dread will overtake them, Proverbs 10:24. Even in the worst of times, there is hope for the saints, Jeremiah 31:17. Hence, the people of God are “prisoners of hope,” Zechariah 9:12. They are those who wait on God.

“They refreshed my spirit,” I Corinthians 16:18.

Sustained exertion dissipates strength. It leads to exhaustion and weariness. Unless a person gets nourishment, fatigue can quickly take over. Hence, being refreshed, revived, or restored is critical to good health—both physically and spiritually.

In the Old Testament, the need for refreshment focused on PHYSICAL weariness. The Sabbath day was a day of rest so that workers could be “refreshed,” Exodus 23:12. Samson drank from a spring and was “revived,” Judges 15:19. David ate food and was “refreshed,” II Samuel 16:14. In the New Testament, the need for refreshment focused on SPIRITUAL fatigue. The renewing came from fellowship with believers who supplied the food of encouragement.

- Romans 15:31,32. Paul appealed to the Romans. He asked them to pray. His life was in jeopardy. His fears were well founded, Acts 21:27; 23:23,24. After the danger passed, the apostle looked forward to the refreshment of their company, Romans 1:11,12.

- I Corinthians 16:18. With a heavy heart, Paul endured a troubled Church. They had withheld their affection, II Corinthians 6:11,12. Yet, some of the saints from Corinth visited Paul. They supplied what the congregation failed to give the apostle, I Corinthians 16:17.

- II Corinthians 7:13. Paul continued to reach out to the Corinthians. In spite of their cantankerous attitude, he send Titus—his co-worker—to encourage them. They received Titus kindly, II Corinthians 7:15,16. Titus was “refreshed.” Paul was glad.

- II Timothy 1:16. The apostle was in prison. His departure from this life was at hand, II Timothy 4:6. He was alone except for one visitor, II Timothy 4:16. Onesiphorus went out of his way to find Paul, II Timothy 1:17. Paul was “refreshed” by his coming.

- Philemon 20. The apostle had converted a runaway slave—Onesimus. He had also converted Philemon who owned the slave, Philemon 19. Hence, Paul said, “You owe me!” He begged Philemon to “refresh” him, to send Onesimus back as a free man, Philemon 12-16. Paul wanted Philemon to pay his spiritual debt, Romans 13:8.


Occupational fatigue is a major problem in ministry. We became weary “in” the work not weary “of” the work. Energy decreases. Quality suffers. Gloom takes over. Every minister needs a sympathizing friend to refresh his sagging spirit, to renew his joy, to restore his optimism, Philemon 7. We can be that friend.

Lord, help me be a refresher of others. May my conversation be uplifting, my attitude encouraging, my outlook positive. Through Jesus, who refreshes me, Amen.
July 29

“I am not doing this for your sake,” Ezekiel 36:32.

Israel had profaned the name of God, Ezekiel 36:20. As far as the pagans were concerned, the defeat of Judah showed that God was impotent. It seemed He was unable to protect His people, Jeremiah 14:8-9. The truth of the matter was quite different. The sin of Israel had caused the exile, Ezekiel 36:17-19. God promised to bring them home not for their sake but for the sake of His holy name, Ezekiel 20:44; 36:22,23.

Ezekiel ushers us into the secret council chamber of heaven. The motive for salvation is revealed. The ground upon which God redeems men is made known. He saves for His sake rather than their sake, Ezekiel 36:32. The foundation of His kindness is not in human works but in divine grace, Romans 11:5,6; Ephesians 2:8,9.


- **The thought expressed.** Is God only concerned for Himself? Is He indifferent to the plight of His people? Is He a selfish parent who rescues His children from disgrace merely to prevent His name from being dishonored? If the Lord had no interest in Israel, it is difficult to believe He was anxious about what the pagans thought. No! God wanted the world to know who He really was, Malachi 1:11. His “name” represents who He is. Jehovah is faithful, honest, kind, just, forgiving, and gracious. His name is more than His reputation. It is the expression of His character. To act out of concern for His name, is to act consistent with Himself, Ezekiel 36:21. Of course God was interested in man. Does not Calvary prove that? Romans 5:8.

- **The idea explained.** What did the Lord mean “not for your sake?” He promised to redeem Israel from captivity, Ezekiel 36:33-36. He would do so because of who He was not because of who they were. They were sinners. They needed a new heart, a new spirit, Ezekiel 36:24-28. “Not for your sake” was a protest against boasting. When Israel initially entered the Promised Land, it was easy for them to assume that their goodness had prompted God to give them Canaan, Deuteronomy 9:1-6. Upon their return from exile, Israel was apt again to assume their goodness prompted His kindness. Nothing could be further from the truth, Ezekiel 36:29-32.

The prophet was lifting the curtain on the sovereignty of divine grace. Israel had sinned. There was nothing in her to suggest the possibility of redemption. Only the character of God was sufficient reason from the salvation of Israel. God is love, I John 4:16b. He saves man for the sake of who He is, for the sake of His name. The most unworthy can dare to hope for redemption. Rescue is not a matter of personal goodness but divine goodness, Romans 3:21-24. This is one of the hardest lessons for us to learn. Eternal life is not for our sake but for the sake of His name.

*Your name is holy, Lord. You deserve all the glory and honor. What I do should be for the sake of Your name. In Christ, may it forever be so.*
When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise,” II Corinthians 10:12.

Any religion which makes a person think he is better than others is suspect. It is the product of vain conceit, Philippians 2:3. The Lord hates arrogance, Proverbs 8:13. It will not go unpunished, Proverbs 16:5.

Paul was concerned about those in the Church who thought they were superior to other believers. They considered themselves right and everyone else wrong. They failed to look outside their narrow circle of saints. They were inflated with a sense of self-importance, II Corinthians 3:5; 10:18.

The proud become wise in their own eyes, Proverbs 26:12; Isaiah 5:21. They made themselves the standard of truth, the yardstick of righteousness. Those who measure themselves by themselves might be better than others. But they certainly are not better than Christ, II Corinthians 4:5.

Measuring others. It is common to judge others by rumored reports. The Corinthians did. They concluded that the personal presence of Paul was “unimpressive,” his oratory skills minimal, II Corinthians 10:10. How unfair! The Corinthians were only looking “on the surface of things,” II Corinthians 10:7. Was not the apostle a fellow believer? Did he not “belong to Christ” as much as his detractors? From their point of view, Paul was a charlatan. Fellow saints often unjustly judge one another. Such slander should never occur, James 4:11. Let the Lord do the judging, I Corinthians 4:4. Our responsibility is to love each other, John 15:12; I John 4:11,12.

Measuring ourselves. The general tendency of human beings is to measure themselves with other people. This is a false standard, a foolish notion. The best of folks are imperfect, Romans 3:10,11. Should the pot say to the kettle, “I am better than you?” Should one saint conclude he is better than another saint? “Not at all,” Romans 3:9. We “should have equal concern for each other,” I Corinthians 12:25. The apostle did not “dare” participate in the game of compare, II Corinthians 10:12. For, he wrote, we should consider others better than ourselves, Philippians 2:3.

Modesty is a great virtue. It prepares the heart to receive the truth.

A sound judgment involves hard work. Many jump to conclusions because it is easy to jump. The conclusions of the Corinthians were unchristian. We must not judge by appearance, John 7:24. Otherwise, even Jesus would not measure up, would not pass our biased test.

As a beggar, what right do I have for looking down on fellow beggars?
I should be focused on Your matchless glory. Help me bow my head, adjust my gaze, and let You do the judging. In the name of the Perfect One, Amen.

Jerusalem lay in ruins. Those who survived the siege were in “trouble.” Their holy city languished in “disgrace,” Nehemiah 1:1-3. Nehemiah was determined to raise it from the rubble, Nehemiah 2:4,5. His enemies were “very much disturbed,” Nehemiah 2:10. They opposed the idea. The restoration project was in considerable jeopardy.

• **Opposition.** Those who resisted the rebuilding of Jerusalem “ridiculed the Jews,” Nehemiah 4:1. The opponents of the reconstruction effort questioned their commitment, impugned their skill, and belittled their endurance, Nehemiah 4:2,3. The sarcasm was intended to break their spirit and crush their will, Nehemiah 4:4,5.


• **Cooperation.** Nehemiah met the challenge. He devised a plan. His strategy was profoundly simple. He divided the task into small, manageable pieces. He gave the workers their assignments. “A man of the cloth,” the high priest, did his part, Nehemiah 3:1. First in honor, first in service, he and his fellow priests lead the way. They believed they were working for God. They did not allow a few shirkers to discourage them, Nehemiah 3:5. Neither should we. God blesses workers not whiners!

• **Preparation.** New attacks were confronted, Nehemiah 4:7,8,11. Nehemiah adjusted his strategy. He prayed, Nehemiah 4:9. He may not have made sense of these new developments, but he instinctively knew what to do, Romans 12:12; Philippians 4:6; James 5:16b. Nehemiah also posted a watch, Nehemiah 4:13,14. Calm courage overcame aggressive intimidation, Nehemiah 4:15. Nehemiah did not fall prey to the delusion that prayer was a substitute for vigilance. The crisis passed. The people continued to work. Idleness incubates fears which industry has no time to entertain.

The danger was real. The laborers knew it all too well, Nehemiah 4:12. They worked long hours, Nehemiah 4:21, under less than ideal conditions, Nehemiah 4:10. Like the apostle Paul, they were “harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears on the inside,” II Corinthians 7:5. Yet they “worked with all their heart!” What was their secret? How did they stay focused?

The builders caught the urgency, grasped the necessity, and sensed the importance of their work. They considered others “who had endured such opposition of sinful men,” Hebrews 12:3. They kept their hands on the plow. Steadied by hope, they persevered. The favor of the Lord rested on them. He established—or, literally, prospered—their work, Psalms 90:17. And, should we do what they did, we would get what they got.

*Sovereign God, my task is big, my resources are small. Opposition is intense. The voice of failure dogs my every move. Bless my efforts. May I work with all my heart and let You do the rest. In Him, who refused to quit, Amen.*
August 1

“No man can...give God a ransom, Psalms 49:7.

Without concern for himself, without a word of protest, the psalmist issues an important moral lesson, Psalms 49:1-3. The destiny of the rich, he wrote, is no different than that of animals. They both die, Psalms 49:10-12.


“We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it,” I Timothy 6:17.

What, then, can a person do? He cannot bribe the Lord. He cannot escape the inevitable, Psalms 49:7-9. The dilemma is real. The choices are few. The wise take stock of their situation, Jeremiah 9:23,24. They put their trust in the Lord alone, Job 1:20,21.

Human beings are made in the image of God, Genesis 1:26,27. They are capable of knowing their Maker. In their lower nature, they, like baboons, birds, and bugs, “belong to the earth,” John 3:31. They are kin to the lower creatures, Psalms 49:12.

Evolution tries to convince the world that that is all we are—clever monkeys, soul-less apes. Our higher nature begs to differ. We have a spirit, Job 32:8. We long to meet the Almighty, Psalms 42:1,2. And, thank God, we are capable of finding Him, Acts 17:26-28. This is the premise upon which this song was written, Isaiah 55:6,7.


• Redemption is costly. No man can redeem himself or others—in this or the next life, Psalms 49:16-19. “The ransom is too costly. The payment is beyond our resources, Psalms 49:7-9. We have nowhere to turn except to the One we offended. Could He be so kind as to spare us? Job 33:23-28. What joy it is to know that His love gladly paid the price, I John 4:9,10; cf. Matthew 20:28; I Timothy 2:5,6.

We are humbled by His marvelous grace, His “indescribable gift,” II Corinthians 9:15. The ransom was expensive. Still God paid it all. He set us free. He begs us not to use our freedom to get entangled again in the sordid behaviors and frivolous pursuits from which we were rescued, Romans 6:1-4. The darkest lie of all time lead Adam and Eve to believe they did not have to obey God. Surely, by now, we know better. And, with the help of the Lord, we can do better.

Lord, my ransom cost You dearly. May my life shout an undying gratitude. Help me tell others of Your goodness. In Him, who rescued me, Amen
Jerusalem was in a pitiful state. It reflected the anger of God, Zechariah 1:2. The people were cold. Their cupboards were bare. Their wallets were empty, Haggai 1:5,6. Yet, Haggai, a contemporary of Zechariah, said the Lord was with them, Haggai 1:13. He even affirmed that the Lord would bless them, Haggai 2:18,19. This was good news. It was also puzzling news. The prophet Zechariah stepped forward to explain the contradiction.

- **The message.** Zechariah began with a call to repentance. “Return to Me,” the Lord said, “and I will return to you,” Zechariah 1:3. This had been said before, Zechariah 1:4. The people had “mocked” the word of God, II Chronicles 36:15,16. The prophets invited them to turn back to the Lord, II Chronicles 30:6; cf. James 4:6. The people refused to do so. Given the defeat and exile, it could easily be concluded that God had abandoned them. Their plight seemed hopeless, their future bleak. Yet, Jehovah was a loving God (though He punishes the guilty), Exodus 34:5-7.

- **The lesson.** Human beings are not particularly good students of the past. They are notoriously blind to the lessons of history. Zechariah was concerned that his generation would fail to learn from former mistakes. “Do not be like your forefathers,” he said, Zechariah 1:4a. He asked his contemporaries the whereabouts of their ancestors, Zechariah 1:5. The prophet urged them to do differently, Zechariah 1:6. It was largely the failure of previous generations that caused the present disaster. In other words, unless their mistakes were remedied, the past would be repeated.

- **The application.** Zechariah did not want the work of restoring the temple to produce a false confidence. The foundation had been laid, Zechariah 8:9. The work was moving ahead. Still the prophet was haunted by the false perception among the people. They thought the Holy Land would be theirs perpetually, Ezekiel 33:24. Would the restored temple recreate that unrealistic assurance which contributed to their recent downfall? Zechariah emphasized first things first. Faithfulness to God is far more important than building (and maintaining) a house of worship, Ezekiel 18:28-32.

> “Without holiness no one will see the Lord,” Hebrews 12:14.

The prophet sought to counter a perennial human tendency—the propensity to deal with external matters rather than internal affairs. Israel was spiritually sick. A rebuilt temple would not restore their health. The restoration of the house of God would be a monument to folly unless it was accompanied by genuine repentance, Jeremiah 3:12; Ezekiel 33:11. What is true in the past is also true today, II Corinthians 5:20.

> Lord, Your ways are just and right. I wish mine were, too. Strip away the veneer that hides my inner sickness. Cleanse me from sin. Give me a new spirit. Teach me to walk in Your ways. With sincere repentance, I pray, through Christ, Amen.
August 3

“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” John 13:15.

During the Passover meal, Jesus washed the disciples feet, John 13:3-5. The greater served the lesser. The master became the servant. Did the disciples understand His actions? John 13:12. Do we?

The disciples were prone to argue about who was greatest among them, Luke 22:24. Petty quarrels regarding such matters were out of place, Luke 22:26. Instead of posturing for position, believers should imitate the example of Christ, 1 Peter 2:21.

• **Reason for imitating Christ.** Among the Greeks and Romans, the gods were a faulty standard of morality. They portrayed a penchant for mischief, an absence of ethical restraint. They required of humans what they themselves would not dream of doing. Therefore, the person of Christ was a refreshing change. He was sinless, 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 John 3:5. As far as possible, we are to be like Him, 1 John 3:7-9. The Lord never asked us to do what He Himself had not already done.

• **Basis for imitating Christ.** If Jesus is the standard, we must do what He did. Christ calls us to be copy cats. “I have set you an example,” He said, “that you should do as I have done for you,” John 13:15. This thought is the backbone of Christian virtue. “Do as I have done” is the barometer of behavior. Famous people are not the gauge of goodness. Our task is to clothe ourselves with Christ, Galatians 3:27. Then we no longer live, but Christ will live in us, Galatians 2:20.

• **Impetus for imitating Christ.** It is one thing to know what to do. It is quite another thing to do it, Romans 7:21-23. Jesus said the disciples knew what to do, John 13:17. Yet knowledge alone did not make them better. It simply made them responsible. They were blessed when they obeyed, James 1:25. Christ left an example for them to follow. Examples encourage. They show the feasibility of accomplishment. They put flesh and blood on abstract commands, Hebrews 13:7. Examples are not merely to be admired. They should be followed.

“Set an example...in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity,” 1 Timothy 4:12.

To us, as well as to His disciples, Jesus was (and is) the ideal man. He was both “Teacher and Lord,” John 13:13. In other words, He was the divine instructor. When we say Jesus was God, we are reminding ourselves that, in Him, God is showing us how to live. He is our example, John 13:14,15. To tell us what to think, what to do, or what to be, is not sufficient. He showed us. It is His example, not merely His words, which inspire us. It gives us the confidence to be what He called us to be, Philippians 4:13.

God, as Your servant, may I follow the Master. May I do as He did. He showed the way. He blazed the trail. Help me walk in His steps, put on the towel, and serve as He served. Through Jesus, my example, Amen.

In making a judgment, humans are limited to external sensory perception. And, unfortunately, what is discovered in this way is open to error, I Samuel 16:1,6,7. God, on the other hand, sees below the surface, Jeremiah 11:20; 17:9,10; 20:12; Luke 16:15. He is able to discern things from the inside out.

Life for us is a series of judgments. In every opinion, an intuitive conclusion is drawn. Each one reflects the inventory of human understanding. Unless heaven sheds light on reality, we grope along in a fog of risky guesses, Proverbs 14:12; 21:2.

• **Divine judgment.** The judgments of God are right, Revelation 16:7; 19:1,2a. His thought processes do not work from the outside to the inside. He sees both the external and internal at the same glance. Man can be deceived, Romans 12:3. God is never fooled. He knows us better than we know ourselves. We are directly, completely exposed to His inspection. The Lord knows our secrets, is aware of our motives, and sees our intentions, I Chronicles 28:9; Psalms 44:20,21; Proverbs 15:11.

• **Human judgment.** We judge by the appearance of things. We see the world like a child pressing his nose against a candy store window. Forces in the universe are observed. We call them the “laws of nature.” We know precious little about them, Job 38:33. The same is true of the mind. We subject it to psychological analysis but understand little about it, Jeremiah 17:9. Our judgment of character is at best a hunch. We are influenced by prejudice, moved by bias. We are as apt to misunderstand others as they are to misunderstand us.

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged,” Matthew 7:1,2.

In spite of our insights, we are still blind. Only God knows us as we are, I Corinthians 13:12. He reads us like a book. His knowledge is not inference but direct observation, Proverbs 16:2; 20:27; Acts 1:24; Romans 8:27. We see the unseen.

What, then, does all of this mean? It indicates we have ample reason to exercise charity toward others, I Corinthians 16:14. It underlines our need for caution in appointing leaders, I Timothy 5:22a. We do not always see the best (or worst) qualities of a person at the first meeting or after a lifetime. Reluctance in judging others is a sign of mistrust in our ability to truly understand them. That is good. Though judgments must be made, let them be made carefully, Matthew 7:15-20. We are fruit inspectors not mind readers!

_O Lord, You are the ultimate Judge of all things, of everyone. You see the unseen. You hear the unheard. You search below the surface. Your understanding is perfect. May I recognize my blindness. Though I must make judgments, let me do so cautiously and charitably. In Him, who has the final say, Amen._
Salvation is a gift from God, Romans 5:15-17. Redemption does not depend on human effort, Romans 9:16; Galatians 3:3. Yet, surprisingly, the Lord encourages us to “make every effort” to reach the goal, to win the prize.

“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to,” Luke 13:24; cf. Hebrews 4:11.

God gives the gift, but the recipient must open it. Human effort is part of the equation. God supplies “everything we need for life and godliness,” II Peter 1:3. “For this very reason,” then, we are to “make every effort,” II Peter 1:5; 3:14. Effort is expected since faith without works is dead, James 2:17,24.

- **Encouragement for making every effort.** The Lord has graciously given us all things, blessed us with “every spiritual blessing, Romans 8:32; Ephesians 1:3. We are lavishly equipped to “participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world,” II Peter 1:4. However, as a well equipped soldier, we must put on the armor of God and stand our ground, Ephesians 6:11-15. In other words, we must add to our faith the moral qualities that prepare us to meet the assault of satan, II Peter 1:5-7. The flame of faith must be fed with the fuel of effort, Philippians 2:12,13. Believers must not receive the grace of God in vain, II Corinthians 6:1. They keep on keeping on. They acquire these high moral qualities in ever “increasing measure,” II Peter 1:8.

- **Reason for making every effort.** A farmer must sow before he can reap. Christians must work before they can rest. Heaven favors those who “make their calling and election sure,” II Peter 1:10,11. “Whoever has will be given more,” Jesus said, “and he will have an abundance,” Matthew 13:12. But, if we fail to press on toward maturity in Christ, our future is in jeopardy, Hebrews 5:13,14. We become nearsighted, blind to our former sinful condition, II Peter 1:9. The spiritually blind are ungrateful for the cleansing of God. They live in the moment. They walk in darkness, I John 2:11. They are in imminent danger of missing heaven.

Faith without effort is incomplete. It is like a cook without a stove, a canoe without a paddle, a flashlight without a battery. The one without the other is “useless.” Faith and obedience “work together” to complete the circle of salvation, James 2:20-22. Faith accepts the Savior. Work maintains the relationship. Thus a saving faith must be dressed in work clothes.

*I believe, Lord, therefore, I work. My effort does not save me. You do. May my obedience be the measure of my thanks for Your amazing grace. Through Christ, my Savior, Amen.*
“Jonah ran away from the Lord.” Jonah 1:3.

Humans often attempt to run away. They try to escape unpleasant situations. In the scriptures, the act of fleeing can be a good thing, I Corinthians 6:18a; II Timothy 2:22; James 4:7. In the case of Jonah, it was an ill-advised plan.

Every attempt to escape from the Lord is naively childish. How can anyone hide from the all-seeing eyes of God? Psalms 139:7-12. Whether avoiding the call to serve Him or concealing a secret sin from Him, trying to run away from the Lord is the height of folly, Psalms 33:13-15; Proverbs 15:3; Jeremiah 23:24.

One can run from God but cannot hide from God.

- **Conflict of wills.** Jonah was not afraid of doing missionary work, Jonah 3:3. The prophet may have been desperate but he was not a coward, Jonah 1:12. Jonah was afraid to succeed! God wanted pagans in a distant land to hear His word, Jonah 1:2; 3:2. He wanted Jonah to preach to them. And, sure enough, when he did, they “turned from their evil ways,” Jonah 3:10. Jonah “became angry” because God forgave the wicked heathens, Jonah 4:1,2. What the Lord intended and what the prophet wanted were entirely different. God was merciful, Jeremiah 18:1-10. Jonah would rather “die” than see the pagans spared, Jonah 4:3. In effect, than, his attempt to escape was an effort to get away from his own bigoted heart. Initially, his plan seemed to work, Jonah 1:3. The prophet took a nap, Jonah 1:5b. However, his scheme soon unraveled, Jonah 1:15. The fugitive was forced to face the implications of his blind bias.

- **Anatomy of disobedience.** Jonah was called to go to a place in the east. But he set off for a destination in the west. He was told to go to Nineveh. But he headed toward Tarshish. His actions were deliberate. He knew he was running from God, Jonah 1:10. Jonah did not love the Lord, John 14:15; I John 5:2. And he did not love his neighbor as himself, Romans 13:9. To run from serving God, to avoid helping others, is a sign of a selfish heart. How can a follower of God disobey the Lord and let sinners be destroyed? The sailors who threw Jonah overboard were more compassionate than the prophet, Jonah 1:14,15. Rather than love the lost, Jonah wished to ignore them. He took pleasure in their demise. He preferred they remain sinners. Jonah did not believe he was his brother’s keeper. He ran from duty. He chose to be a deserter. He disgraced his profession and became a prisoner of sin, Romans 7:22,23.

Like Jonah, the majority of believers are taking a nap. We think the Gospel is universal but are content to do nothing to take it to the ends of the earth. We bring contempt on the very ideal we profess. When there is no sacrifice made (or risk incurred) to see it happen, our Christian claim is called into question. Where are we headed—Nineveh or Tarshish?

_Lord, I do not want to be a Jonah-Christian. May I go where You want me to go. Keep me from betraying Your cause, forsaking Your assignment. In Him, Amen._

“Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets, Amos 3:7.

The judgments of heaven are preceded by the warnings of God. The flood, Genesis 6:13, destruction of Sodom, Genesis 19:12,13, plagues of Egypt, Exodus 7:3-5, defeat of Israel, Amos 3:1,2, and fall of Jerusalem Matthew 24:1,2, are cases in point. But the wrath of God can surprise folks, Matthew 24:38,39, if they disregard His warning, Genesis 19:14.


- **God warns.** Judgment without warning loses its value. The fear of the rod is a deterrent to disobedience, Proverbs 22:15. The Lord prefers to prevent rather than punish. His wrath is expressed when His threats are ignored, Proverbs 1:22-26; Jeremiah 6:10,11. God frightens with the lightning of His bark so that He might withhold the thunder of His bite, Ezekiel 33:11. He does “nothing without revealing His plan.”

The hurt happens because the caution is not heeded, Ezekiel 33:1-5. In every age, God has selected those through whom He communicates His intentions, Hebrews 1:1,2. When He reveals His secret counsel, His messengers must speak, Psalms 39:2,3; Jeremiah 4:19; 20:8,9. The Lord does not play hide and seek, Genesis 18:17. “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear” the warning of God, Mark 4:23.

- **Prophet speaks.** God revealed His will through men. He inspired them to speak. He moved them to write. The written form of their message is preserved in the scriptures. The revelation of God bound in a book thoroughly equips us for “every good work, II Timothy 3:16,17. The Bible is a permanent record for everyone to read about His plans and purposes. Nothing else is needed. “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God,” I Peter 4:11a.

God has spoken, Amos 3:8. His intentions have been revealed. How dare we keep silent? The word has gone forth. The warning has been sounded. Surely “we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard,” Acts 4:20. Necessity rests on us. We are “compelled” to tell others what we have been told, I Corinthians 9:16.

“The Lord...takes the upright into His confidence,” Proverbs 3:32.

God has declared His plan. The secret has been revealed not simply to excite wonder but to guide conduct. The unknown is known so that man may “seek the Lord while He may be found,” Isaiah 55:6,7. He has spoken. Are we listening?

Thank You, Father, for making Your intentions known. I am listening.
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Because of Jesus, Let it be so.
August 8

“God...devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from Him, II Samuel 14:14b.

King David was between a rock and a hard place. One of his sons, Absalom, had killed another of his sons, Amnon, II Samuel 13:28,29. Since the days of Noah, the law was clear: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed,” Genesis 9:6; Exodus 21:12. Absalom feared for his life. He ran, II Samuel 13:37.

The parental affection of David trumped the judicial requirement of the law. The king wanted Absalom to come home, II Samuel 14:1. The collision of the parental and the judicial is a dilemma for both heaven and earth. But, thankfully, God has devised a way to rescue the banished so they need not remain estranged from Him, II Samuel 14:14b.

• **Alienation of man.** Sinners are separated from the Lord, Isaiah 59:1,2. They are afraid of God. Like Absalom, the wicked flee to the shadowy world of sin. There “in a distant country” they engage in “wild living,” Luke 15:13. It is a wretched existence filled with enormous remorse, II Peter 2:21. The wrath of God remains on them, John 3:36.

Absalom found friends in Geshur. He was among the extended family of his mother, I Chronicles 3:2. But he wanted to see his dad, II Samuel 14:32. In the same way, the soul of man is not happy until it rests with its Maker. Mankind fears the punishment of everlasting destruction that shuts him out from the presence of the Lord, II Thessalonians 1:9. This is as much a dilemma for God as it is for man, Ezekiel 18:32.

• **Restoration of man.** The misery of man is his own fault. The salvation of man is from the Lord, Psalms 3:8; 62:1. God wants everyone to be saved, II Peter 3:9. Hence, He “redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us,” Galatians 3:13. Christ died for us, Romans 5:8. He “suffered for our sins” so that “He might bring us to God,” I Peter 3:18. Without God, “we must die,” II Samuel 14:14a. Jesus has opened the door. He has put out the welcome mat. We must accept His offer and return to the Him before the door is closed and locked forever, Isaiah 55:6.

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy,” Isaiah 55:7.

Jehovah begs. He pleads. He warns. He does everything He can (short of using force) to bring us home, II Corinthians 6:2. The clock is ticking. We must RSVP before the invitation expires. Why stumble along in darkness? John 12:35. God has sent the light. He has devised the way—the only way—to escape eternal banishment. The kindness of God waits for a cordial response from man, Titus 3:3-7. Do we want to go home?

*My estrangement from You is my fault. But You have devised a way. You have invited me home. I come to receive what I do not deserve. Thank You, Lord, for Your compassion. I long to be with You. In Him, who paid the price for me, Amen.*
The spiritual odyssey of the apostle Paul was life changing. Early on he reveled in his noble birth, orthodox belief, and meticulous obedience, Philippians 3:4b-6. After accepting Christ, he had a different take on things, Philippians 3:7. The poster boy for “works” became the flag bearer for “faith.”

His views changed. What he once considered an advantage became a detriment. Like a ship laden with merchandise in heavy seas, Paul threw the cargo overboard. In order to gain salvation, he disposed of his narrow legalism, Galatians 2:15,16.

**What he renounced.** Nothing the apostle laid aside was altogether bad. Quite to the contrary! Paul realized the advantages of being a Jew, Romans 3:1,2; 9:1-5. But he renounced a reliance on his Jewish heritage as a ticket to heaven. Salvation was by grace, Romans 11:6. Jewish assets became liabilities. What seemed like gain was loss.

**What he wanted.** The apostle sought “the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ,” Philippians 3:8a. It was not a pipe dream, John 10:14. It was a knowledge gained by an intimate personal association. It implied Christ living in him, Colossians 1:27. His occupancy gave life, I John 5:12. The indwelling Christ became his “righteousness, holiness, and redemption,” I Corinthians 1:30.

**What he acquired.** After his conversion, Paul considered everything as garbage except knowing Christ, Philippians 3:8b; cf. Isaiah 64:6. For the apostle, Christ was life, Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:21; Colossians 3:4. Jesus was what made Paul tick. The Lord was the engine of his life. Christianity was more than information about Christ. The apostle wanted to live the life that Jesus lived. He wanted to be like Him, I John 3:2,3. “I want to know Christ.” Paul said, Philippians 3:10. He wanted to be united with the Lord.

Union with Christ implies the duplication of His life in our experience. It signifies being crucified with Him, Romans 6:6, buried with Him, Colossians 2:12, and raised with Him, Colossians 3:1. Union with Christ means we are joint heirs with Him, Romans 8:17. It means we will some day reign with Him, II Timothy 2:12. In effect, our life is transformed by Him, Romans 12:2. It is conformed to His likeness, Romans 8:29.

We live because Christ lives in us.

Thus, little by little, we become like Him inwardly, II Corinthians 5:16,17. The process is slow (and can be painful). The results vary in degree from person to person according to their stage of spiritual development. Yet, eventually, the believer, with the help of the Lord, wins the battle to walk in newness of life, Romans 6:4.

*I want Christ to be my life, Father. Why should I be me when I can be like Him? Bless my transformation. I pray, through Him, who changes me, Amen.*
“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees,” Matthew 5:20.

When Jesus lived on the earth, the Old Testament was called “the law and the prophets.” Christ had no intention of abolishing them, Matthew 5:17. Neither did His apostles. Instead, they upheld the law, Romans 3:31. Though the sacrificial rites and priestly ceremonies were set aside, Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:16, the moral teachings of the law and the prophets remained in force, Matthew 5:19.

Over the centuries, the Old Testament was reinterpreted by Jewish scholars. Layer upon layer of human commentary obscured the original purposes of God, Isaiah 29:13; cf. Matthew 15:3-6. This culminated in letting go of the commands of God and holding to the traditions of men, Mark 7:8. How unfortunate!

“Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom…but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence, Colossians 2:23.

• **Righteousness distorted.** The Pharisees were manufacturers of religious rules. Their nit-picking left them blind to more important matters, Matthew 23:23,24. Christian righteousness must avoid theological hair-splitting, Matthew 23:16,17. In a series of pointed illustrations, Jesus peeled back the layers of human formulation that distorted authentic spirituality. He repeatedly used a catch-phrase formula: “you have heard…but I tell you,” Matthew 5:21,22a,27,28,31-34a,38,39a,43,44. He used these words to highlight His reaffirmation of the will of God. The Pharisees dealt with external obedience. The Lord focused on motives, desires, and attitudes, Matthew 23:27,28.

• **Distortions condemned.** Christ criticized the Pharisees. He called them “hypocrites,” Matthew 23:5-7; cf. Matthew 6:1. Their theology made their converts worse, Matthew 23:15. He epitomized these religious pretenders as an offspring of snakes, Matthew 23:33. His language was strong. Their practices were self-indulgent, Matthew 23:25,26. When it came to common ethical issues, the Pharisees invented rules that applied to outward behavior, Matthew 15:1,2. They brushed aside the source of moral corruption that festered in the heart, Matthew 15:17-20. The Lord warned that surface obedience was not enough: “Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees…you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven,” Matthew 5:20.

The law was not the problem. It was “holiness, righteousness, and goodness,” Romans 7:12. Human rules that kept the hands busy but the heart untouched was the difficulty. The Pharisees emphasized the “letter of the law” not the spirit of God, Matthew 5:43-48. The results were shallow, phony, and self-serving. They promoted a do-it-yourself religion. Jesus stressed dependence on God, Matthew 18:3,4. The source of genuine righteousness is in the Lord not in human beings, Romans 3:21,22a. Are we any different than the Pharisees?

*Interpretations have their place, Father, but they can obscure the truth. Teach me Your way. I depend on You. In Jesus, my righteousness, Amen.*
“Who is like the Lord our God,” Psalms 113:5.

The gods battle among themselves for superiority. Their fighting does not settle the issue. When Jehovah steps onto the scene, however, the wars cease. The most renowned among the deities become silent. A quiet voice utters a challenging question:


God is above all gods. He is in a class apart. There is no other god His equal, Exodus 8:10, no other deity like Him in all the earth, Exodus 9:14. “For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works You do? Deuteronomy 3:24; cf. Deuteronomy 4:35; 33:26.


• Awesome in glory. Part of the holiness of God is His mighty power against those who worship idols, Jeremiah 10:6-8. He causes the pagans to tremble. The nations will bow down and worship Him. They will bring glory to His name, Psalms 86:8-10. Jehovah is more awesome than the angels who surround Him “in the council of the holy ones,” Psalms 89:5-8. He does not give His glory to others, Isaiah 42:8. The rebellious must not rise up against Him, Psalms 66:7. If God is not loved, He should be feared. If His grace is rejected, His wrath will come. We cannot truly praise Him for His mercy, unless we are willing to honor Him for His deliverance, II Samuel 7:22,23.

Jehovah does things an idol cannot do. He “pardons sin and forgives transgressions,” Micah 7:18. To whom, then, shall we compare Him? Isaiah 40:18. There is no god like God. “I am God,” Jehovah said, “there is no other.” And, in order to drive home His point, He repeated, “I am God, there is none like Me,” Isaiah 46:9. He is without comparison, without peer, I Kings 8:23. What an incredible privilege to have Him as the protector of our body, the watchman of our soul.

Great God and Kind Shepherd, I stand in awe. Joy floods my heart. You are truly majestic, wonderfully awesome. All praise, honor, and glory is due Your matchless name. Thanks for all You are and all You do. Through Your Son, Amen.

When all is said and done, history yields a clear conclusion: “God is good!” This arresting truth was revealed to Moses, Exodus 33:18,19, recorded in the songs of Israel, Psalms 86:5; 145:7, and proclaimed by the prophets, Isaiah 63:7; Jeremiah 33:10,11. He “watches over the way of the righteous,” Psalms 1:6.

“The Lord is good,” I Chronicles 16:34. He is thoughtful, pleasant, generous, and righteous. He is both good and does what is good, Psalms 119:68. He actively engages in kind deeds, Exodus 34:5-7a. “The Lord is good to those who hope in Him,” Lamentations 3:25; cf. Romans 8:28. He feeds the hungry. Rescues the poor. Lifts up the fallen. And heals the sick. It is His nature to go around doing good, Acts 10:38.

• **He protects.** God is “a refuge in times of trouble,” Nahum 1:7; cf. Psalms 9:9; 46:1; Proverbs 14:26. The righteous run to Him and are safe, Proverbs 18:10; cf. Psalms 16:1; 91:1-4; Jeremiah 16:19a. In every form of calamity, the Lord is a present help, a strong protector. No enemy can prevail. No disaster can consume. No condition can overwhelm, Isaiah 26:3; cf. Matthew 11:28-30. He gives peace when there is anxiety, light where there is darkness, strength when there is weakness, Psalms 36:7.

God protects because God cares.

• **He cares.** The Lord “cares for those who trust in Him,” Nahum 1:7. God knows our struggles. He is aware of our burdens. Nothing is hidden from Him, I Kings 8:39; Psalms 139:2,3; Jeremiah 17:10. He understands our circumstances better than we do. He knows precisely what we need, Psalms 37:18. Because He made us, His compassion protects, assists, and saves us, Psalms 145:9.

There is something very comforting about His goodness. He lovingly provides for our welfare. He constantly cares for our happiness. We are not lost in the huge multitude, hidden by the complexity of the world, or obscured by the vastness of space, Psalms 8:3,4.

At times, it might seem like we are “forgotten,” Isaiah 49:14. However, God reassures His people that that can never happen, Isaiah 49:15. He has tattooed our names on the palms of His hands, Isaiah 49:16. As a good shepherd, He calls His sheep by name, John 10:3. “The Lord knows those who are His,” II Timothy 2:19. Though we may walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we need not fear any evil. Temporary tribulation may come our way, but permanent protection is not far behind, Revelation 7:14b-17. Never again will we suffer! Never again will we hurt! Count on it. It is guaranteed.

*I cling to Your promise. In times of despair, I will call on Your name. I long to be under Your tent, to hide beneath Your wings. May that day come soon. I pray, with humble confidence, through the name of Him who is good, Amen.*
The ancients believed the Lord lived in heaven, Psalms 2:4. Yet they also believed He was “enthroned with the cherubim” above the ark of the covenant, 1 Samuel 4:4a; II Samuel 6:2; Psalms 99:1. Heaven was His throne and the earth His footstool, Isaiah 66:1a. The Lord was everywhere, Psalms 139:7-10. In other words, He lived above but visited the earth below.

- **Reality of His obscurity.** Jehovah is a God who hides Himself, Isaiah 45:15. No one has seen Him, Deuteronomy 4:12; Matthew 11:27; John 1:18. He is shrouded in a cloud, Leviticus 16:2, shielded from sight by “dark clouds,” Psalms 18:9, and obscured by “thick darkness,” Psalms 97:2. He hides Himself because human beings cannot see His face and live, Exodus 33:20; cf. I Timothy 6:13-16. No one can “fathom the mysteries of God” nor “probe the limits of the Almighty,” Job 11:7,8. In this sense, then, He is unknowable, Deuteronomy 29:29; Ecclesiastes 11:5. His judgments are unsearchable, “His paths beyond tracing out!” Romans 11:33. He leads His people without leaving a footprint, Psalms 77:19. “Now we see but a poor reflection,” Paul wrote. Later “we shall see Him face to face,” I Corinthians 13:12. Until then life is often a confused tangle of threads like the underside of cross-stitch needlework.

- **Question of His presence.** At the dedication of the temple, the glory of God (as a cloud) filled the sanctuary, I King 8:10,11. Then, Solomon asked, “Will God really dwell on earth?” I Kings 8:27. His inquiry seemed to negate the purpose of having the temple. Nevertheless, the answer to his question was: “Yes” and “No!” The Lord will visit the earth when necessary. But He is not confined to a particular place, John 4:21,23. “The Most High does not live in houses made by men,” Acts 7:48. Yet it is the very invisibility of God which makes visible symbols important. The infinite must be made tangible for the finite. We need a way to search after Him so that we might find Him, Acts 17:24-27. In the Old Testament, the temple was the place where men could meet the Lord.

    Within Your power I stand.
    On every side I see Your hand.

We are dependent on our senses for seeing the invisible, Hebrews 11:27. Our faith expresses itself in verbal symbols. Fellowship with God is impossible without them. He is a Spirit. When we go to the place of the purely spiritual, there will be no need for visual aids, material symbols, or tangible props. The apostle John, in his vision of heaven, “saw no temple.” Why? In eternity, the Lord God Almighty and Jesus the Lamb will be the temple, Revelation 21:22. Now, however, we need help in seeing Him, John 14:8,9. Later we “shall see Him as He is,” I John 3:2.

    God, You have given me a glimpse of Your
    grandeur. I long to see You as You really are.
    Till then I continue to earnestly search for You.
    In Him, who is the radiance of divine glory, Amen.


His story revolved around leaven. Generally, leaven symbolized political and moral corruption, Mark 8:15; cf. I Corinthians 5:6-8. However, the Lord referred to the good qualities of yeast. He compared it to the kingdom of God, Luke 13:20,21. Jesus likened the silent growth of the kingdom to the pervasive influence of leaven.

“A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough,” Galatians 5:9.

• Kind of change. Yeast does not so much effect the outward appearance as the inward character of the dough. Likewise, the working of the kingdom of God is an internal affair. Often people wish to revitalize society by changing government leadership, passing new laws, and forming different agencies. All of that is like putting new patches on old garments, new wine in old wineskins, Matthew 9:16,17.

A nation is changed when those in the society are changed. Few ideas have greater application. Tinkering with externals is fruitless. The inside must be cleaned out. Christ must dwell in the heart, Ephesians 3:16,17a. New paint on an old car does not make it run better.

In establishing His kingdom, the Lord did not introduce a vast organization to rule the world. Instead, He offered the Spirit to affect new attitudes about existing behavior, I John 2:15-17. The kingdom, Jesus said, is like yeast!

• Method of change. Throughout history, nations have expanded chiefly by the use of force. And, from time to time, the Church has compelled men at sword point to accept Christ. The latter is a gross misapplication of His words, Luke 14:23. “My kingdom is not of this world,” He said, John 18:36. The employment of physical power is contrary to the spirit of the kingdom, Zechariah 4:6.

Leaven has no influence as long as it remains separate from the dough. If Jesus had remained secluded in the carpenter shop, His influence would have been minimal. Life touching life, people interacting with people is the secret of the kingdom, Matthew 5:14-16. Salt must flavor otherwise it is good for nothing, Matthew 5:13. Leaven that does not leaven is useless.

The kingdom operates invisibly—behind the scenes—to produce massive changes. Its influence is slow but sure. It does not stop until it works through the entire batch of dough, Matthew 13:33. We, too, must not despise small efforts, Matthew 13:31,32.

Help me, Lord, to grasp the importance of being leaven. My smallest kindness is worth more than my grandest intention. In Jesus, who leavens me, Amen.
“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever,” Daniel 12:3.

A catastrophe was coming, a time of great distress, Daniel 12:1a,b; cf. Matthew 24:21. Amidst the devastation, the people of God will be delivered, Daniel 12:1c; cf. Matthew 24:30,31. During the conflict, the wise will encourage others to walk in the paths of righteousness, Daniel 11:33-35. Because of their prudent behavior, they “will shine like the brightness of the heavens,” Daniel 12:3; cf. Matthew 13:43. Who are these wise ones? How may we be numbered among them?

- **Clear thinking.** The wise think through complex issues. They use practical common sense. The wise understand and know the Lord, Jeremiah 9:23,24. They live a disciplined and prudent life, “doing what is right, just, and fair,” Proverbs 1:1-3. They “will never walk in darkness” because they have the “light of life” in them, John 8:12. As children of light, they pursue goodness, righteousness, and truth, Ephesians 5:8,9. In spite of bad circumstances, the wise live good lives.

- **Active converting.** The wise are concerned for others. They “lead many to righteousness,” Daniel 12:3. They are “a light shining in a dark place,” II Peter 1:19. They declare the praises of Him who calls the sinner out of darkness and into His wonderful light, I Peter 2:9. They faithfully invite the lost to safety. But, more than that, they lead the sinner to righteousness, to live in newness of life, Romans 6:1-4.

Conversion does not remodel but remake the old man.

The wise who convert others “will shine like the brightness of the heavens,” Daniel 12:3. No light in the daytime is brighter than the sun. No luminary at night is greater than the moon. Though the clouds of calamity may gather, the wisdom of believers will shine through the bleak horizon. They reflect the Father of lights, Psalms 27:1; Isaiah 2:5. And, in eternity, He will continue to be their lamp, their everlasting light, Isaiah 60:19; Revelation 22:5.

The work of the wise is a noble occupation. They assist others—leading them back to God. They follow the example of Jesus, Mark 10:45. As ambassadors of the Gospel, they recognize that their labor is practical rather than theoretical, II Corinthians 5:20. They refrain from proclaiming theological notions, sectarian dogmas, and ecclesiastical influence. The wise show that the power of salvation is from God, II Corinthians 4:7. Their wisdom is a spiritual gift—the product of prayer, James 1:5.

*It is clear, Father, that the world needs saving. Darkness abounds. Moral decay is rampant. May I do my part. Let Your light shine through me. Help me lead many to righteousness. I pray this in the name of Christ, my Lord, who is the light of men, Amen.*
“Watch your life and doctrine closely,” I Timothy 4:16.


We live in the later times, in an age when “deceiving spirits” teach false doctrine. The faithful must oppose such gross misrepresentation of the truth. In order to accomplish this sacred assignment, diligence is required, I Timothy 4:15a. To “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints,” is a staggering obligation, Jude 3. It deserves constant care and wholehearted attention, I Timothy 4:15b.

• **Watch your life.** “Life” and “doctrine” are joined together, I Timothy 4:16a. They must not be put asunder. “Know yourself” is key. Are we pretending? Do we merely go through the motions? We must “watch” like a prison guard keeping track of an inmate. There is a con artist living inside all of us, wanting to break free, acting one way but thinking another way. The war is real. Do we feel it? Are we aware of the danger? James 4:1,2; I Peter 2:11. “The spirit is willing but the body is weak,” Matthew 26:41. The battle is not a frivolous affair. But many quit the fight.

“If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall,” I Corinthians 10:12.

• **Check your doctrine.** Holy living and sound teaching are close companions. Hence, the apostle charged his readers to focus on both of them. This is not easy. “The time has come when men will not put up with sound doctrine,” II Timothy 4:3,4. Stay the course. Endure the disappointments. “Persevere” in holy living and faithful teaching. In doing so, we will save both ourselves and those who hear us, I Timothy 4:16b,c. The price of holding the line is worth the pain of being ignored, Ezekiel 33:7-9. The Lord promises a special reward to all who remain true, Daniel 12:3; Matthew 13:43.

The Christian life calls for keeping on keeping on. Spiritual maturity does not happen overnight. It takes time, I Corinthians 13:11. Nevertheless, gaining “the whole measure of the fullness of God” is attainable, Ephesians 4:13. That is the goal. The game is not won on the first play. The crown of life comes at the end of the journey. Those who hang in and hold on will win the race. God is faithful, Hebrews 10:23.

Life and teaching must be guarded “closely,” I Timothy 4:16. He who has ears let him hear. Perils will come. Deserters will go. Will we fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith? II Timothy 4:7. Time will tell. God already knows.

Lord, You do not mince words. I have been warned. The obstacles are real. I intend to meet each challenge successfully in the strength You provide one day at a time. I am more than a conqueror. Through Christ, the commander-in-chief over the angelic armies of heaven, Amen.
During the conquest of the Promised Land, Israel was “unable to drive out all of the people from the plains.” The reason was clear. The Canaanites “had iron chariots,” Judges 1:19. This well-equipped military force “cruelly oppressed” the people of God, Judges 4:3.

The scene was ugly. The situation was desperate. Something had to be done. A plan was devised. Israel would “lure” the enemy into the marsh lands near the Kishon River, Judges 5:21. It was a grand victory. Israel took courage from the events of that day.

“So may all Your enemies perish, O Lord! But may they who love You be like the sun when it rises in its strength,” Judges 5:31.

In preparation for the battle, there was considerable concern. The odds were against Israel. Barak, the commander of the Hebrew army, hesitated. Deborah, a prophetess, told Barak that “the Lord, the God of Israel, commands you,” Judges 4:6. He was reassured that the battle strategy would be successful, Judges 4:7. Still Barak wavered, Judges 4:8. In the end, God was the decisive difference in the outcome, Judges 4:23.

- **Dependence on physical forces.** The Canaanites relied on human strength. And, to be sure, the nine hundred iron chariots were impressive. The Canaanites fought gallantly “but carried off no plunder,” Judges 5:19. Their mighty horses with their thundering hoofs rushed head long into defeat, Judges 5:22. Not a single soldier survived, Judges 4:16. The enemy had pushed their tyranny too far. They insured their demise by reliance on physical force. The size of their army, the skill of their troops was an empty boast, a broken reed. Their strength became their weakness.

- **Dependence on spiritual resources.** God finds opportunity in human peril. So the Lord went ahead of Israel, Judges 4:14. He made a sure defeat into an impossible triumph, Judges 4:24. Barak was one of those who through faith conquered kingdoms, whose weakness was turned to strength, and who became powerful in battle routing foreign armies, Hebrews 11:32-34. Strategies are necessary but, when all is said and done, faith in God is the victory, I John 5:4b. We overcome because the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world, I John 4:4; cf. I Corinthians 1:25.

Do we trust too much in material resources? Certainly Deborah inspired courageous effort. And Barak took up arms. Yet the great need was for God to go ahead of them, to guide their feeble efforts on the field of combat. Like Moses, than, the way ahead is clear—the Presence of God must go with us, Exodus 33:15.

Father in heaven, lead me this day. I follow You in uncompromising faith. Your presence is my victory. When You go ahead, success is guaranteed. To You be the glory, praise, and honor forever and ever without end, Amen.
“To the pure, all things are pure,” Titus 1:15.

The heart of the matter is the heart, Proverbs 4:23. Outward goodness flows from inward purity, Matthew 7:17,18. Thus, Paul was completely confident. The indwelling Christ sets us free from sin and death, Romans 8:1,2.

Jesus vigorously opposed the belief that external things corrupted the internal spirit, Matthew 15:11; Mark 7:20-23. That is the consistent teaching of the New Testament, Acts 10:9-15. “No food is unclean in itself,” Romans 14:14. It is the disposition of the heart, the intention of the mind which renders things clean or unclean, Luke 11:39,40. Therefore,

“to the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted… nothing is pure,” Titus 1:15a.

When the mind is polluted, everything God made is seen through defiled eyes. The thinking of an impure person is “earthly, unspiritual, and of the devil,” James 3:13-16. To him, all things are dirty. It cannot be otherwise, James 3:11,12.

- **The impure.** When the inside of man is soiled, the thoughts, wishes, purposes, and ambitions are stained. The moral constitution is broken. The mind is debased, Titus 1:15b. In some cases, the impure “claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him,” Titus 1:16a. In Church, they seem pious. In the marketplace, they are repulsive. Their obscene mind makes unbecoming jokes, sordid comments, and disgusting innuendoes, Ephesians 5:11,12. “They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good,” Titus 1:16b.

- **The pure.** It is the inner part of a person that determines the outer conduct. If one is truly purified, the darkness is removed. The person lives in light. He has “nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness,” Ephesians 5:8,9. The truth is obvious. Unless the vessel is pure, everything poured into it will become adulterated. The man with a dirty mind makes all things dirty. He twists lovely thoughts into crude suggestions. He turns beautiful forms into objects of lust. He gives double meanings to innocent gestures.

Nevertheless, it is possible for a person to be good in an evil world. The difference is the “washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit,” Titus 3:5b; cf. 1 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:25-27; 1 John 1:7,9. A person must be born again from above, John 3:5-7. An extreme makeover of the mind is required, Romans 12:2. Believers rely on the Lord for a clean heart, a renewed spirit, Psalms 51:10-12. A pure exterior is achieved by a clean interior. That is the way of God, Ezekiel 36:26,27.

I long for a pure heart, O Lord. It is a gift of grace. I need Your indwelling Spirit. Your washing has made me clean. Your renewing will keep me clean. That is the way I want it to be. Through Christ, my Savior, Amen.
“I will take note of you as you pass under My rod,” Ezekiel 20:37.

The leaders came to “inquire of the Lord” while in Babylonian exile, Ezekiel 20:1. It was twelve years before the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, Jeremiah 52:12,13. The elders hoped to get a word from God. Instead, they were turned away, Ezekiel 20:2,3.

The prophet launched into a litany of their sins—both idolatry, Ezekiel 20:8, and desecration of the Sabbath, Ezekiel 20:13. That was why God refused to speak to them, Ezekiel 20:30,31. The Lord was finished with friendly chit chat.

“I will execute judgment upon You,” Ezekiel 20:35.

Israel would “pass under the rod” of God, Ezekiel 20:36,37. A rod was used by a shepherd, Leviticus 27:32. Every evening, while going into the fold, the sheep passed under his rod one by one to be counted, Jeremiah 33:13. The rod was also an instrument of punishment, Proverbs 10:13; 13:24; 22:15; 23:13,14; 26:3; Isaiah 10:5. Therefore, in Ezekiel, passing under the rod of God had a threefold meaning.

**God rules.** Ezekiel 20:33. Israel wanted to worship idols, Ezekiel 20:32. The sins of men do not invalidate the sovereignty of God. Moral obligations are eternal. The same “outstretched arm” that delivered them from Egyptian slavery, Exodus 6:6; Deuteronomy 4:34, ruled over them in Babylonian captivity, Ezekiel 20:33. If men will not bow to His staff of mercy, they will feel the rod of His anger.

**God punishes.** Ezekiel 20:34. Israel will not be lost among the throngs of heathen worshippers. God will gather them. He will judge each one of them as a shepherd inspects his sheep in the evening. “As I judged your fathers,” the Lord said, “so I will judge you,” Exodus 32:25-29; Numbers 14:21-23; 21:4-6. The punishments of God are the “rebuke” of heaven, Isaiah 66:15.

**God restores.** Ezekiel 20:40,41. The Lord knows those who are His, John 10:14. He can easily distinguish the sheep from the goats, Matthew 25:31-33. God will separate believers from unbelievers, the faithful from the unfaithful. His judgments will show that He is in control.

There are limits to the patience of Jehovah. He had had enough. The sin of Israel provoked the anger of the Lord. In a tone of exasperation, He told them, “Go and serve your idols!” Ezekiel 20:39a; cf. Jeremiah 44:25; Hosea 4:16,17. Eventually some would realize the defilement they brought on themselves. God would have mercy for the sake of His name, Ezekiel 20:43,44. Good comes out of bad when His grace is at work.

_Sovereign Lord, You know my deeds. You do not take them lightly. Neither should I. May Your outstretched arm deliver me as I pass under Your rod. Have mercy. Extend grace. In Your Son, Amen._

David was on the run. He fled to Philistia in order to escape from Saul. There he settled with his men and their families, I Samuel 27:1-4. From the safety of Philistia, David raided the Amalekites. He took plunder and killed his captives, I Samuel 27:8,9.

Sometime later, while David and his men were away, the Amalekites came to Philistia. The Amalekites practiced the ancient rule: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” Leviticus 24:19,20; cf. I Samuel 30:1,2. David was devastated, I Samuel 30:3,4. His men were bitter. They considered stoning David. In this moment of crisis, David found strength in the Lord, I Samuel 30:6. His example teaches two important lessons.

- **Strength comes during weakness.** Until we are brought to our knees, we cannot stand on our feet. “That is why…I delight in weaknesses,” Paul said, “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” II Corinthians 12:10. God makes no one strong who does not consider himself weak. Therefore, the apostle wrote, “be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power,” Ephesians 6:10. “Blessed are those whose strength is in You,” Psalms 84:5. David was empowered when he was powerless. His family was kidnapped. His house was destroyed. His belongings were stolen. His men were in mutiny. He was stripped of everything he had. When brought face to face with helplessness, there are only two choices available—sink down in despair or reach up for God. David chose the latter. The faithful always do, Joshua 1:9.

- **Strength comes from above.** When all else fails, believers put their hope in God, Psalms 25:5; 33:20; 39:7; 42:5; 130:7; 131:3. For Jehovah is a God of consolation, a source of comfort, a refuge on stormy seas, Psalms 9:10. His children beg for mercy, Psalms 6:2. The Lord answers, Psalms 17:6. “Our help is in the name of the Lord,” Psalms 124:8. The mistake we make is to look for strength in ourselves. We are mere flesh—battered by change, limited in dexterity, and blind to the future. David turned to God, I Samuel 30:7,8. God turned his tears into triumph, I Samuel 30:18,20. David could truthfully say,

> “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me, Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me,” Psalms 23:4.

David did not ask God for a miracle. He did not plead for a legion of angels. He asked for advice. He waited for a word from heaven. Then he moved ahead, Psalms 16:7. Difficulties were overcome. Victories were won. All went well because everyone went with God. A few months later David was crowned king over the nation of Israel.

> Unless I go with You, Lord, I will not go very far. You are my guide, my strength, and my God. May I never proceed without You. In Jesus, who leads me through dark and difficult valleys, Amen.
August 21


Abraham is asked to sacrifice Isaac, Genesis 22:1,2. Human sacrifice was an ancient custom, II Kings 3:27. To us the thought of killing our children is incredibly distasteful. The obedience of Abraham is a dramatic demonstration of his faith, Hebrews 11:17-19.

God is not a cruel Master but a kind Father. He prefers mercy, not sacrifice. He wanted an understanding of who He is more than He wanted burnt offerings, Hosea 6:6. He is not interested in human sacrifice, but justice, mercy, and humility, Micah 6:7,8. Nevertheless, in a time when human sacrifice was practiced, the Lord put Abraham to the test.

Faith is trusting God to provide what He promised.

- **The test.** God authored the exam. He who made the human heart knows how to test it, Psalms 26:2. After giving the aged patriarch a son, Jehovah asks Abraham to give the boy back. What a shock! Trials usually come at unanticipated times and in unexpected ways. Divine favor does not preclude divine testing. Abraham seemed unmoved. Without protest, he prepared to sacrifice his son, Genesis 22:3-5. Surely he wondered. Surely he had questions. None were recorded. Abraham put his faith in God, Genesis 22:6-8.

- **The victory.** In spite of the agony, Abraham moved ahead. The pain was unbearable. He fought back the tears. The scene seemed surreal. How could it be happening? Methodically the altar was built. The wood was arranged. Isaac was laid on the altar. The hour of destiny had come. A loving father was poised to kill his innocent son, Genesis 22:9,10. Faith acted. Abraham “did not waver through unbelief,” Romans 4:20.

- **The reward.** At the critical moment, God broke the silence. Abraham had obeyed. God was honored. Isaac was spared, Genesis 22:11,12. Faith trusted in the provision of the Lord. A ram was provided, Genesis 22:13,14. The test was over. Abraham passed, Genesis 22:15-18. A little faith can remove mountains, Matthew 21:21,22. For it is not the amount of faith one has but the One in whom faith is placed that makes the difference. Abraham puts us to shame. We admire his faith without trying to copy his obedience!

Like Jesus, Abraham laid aside his self will, Matthew 26:39. He sacrificed himself before He put Isaac on the altar, Romans 12:1. This is the requirement of genuine faith. We must take God at His word, expect Him to provide, and move ahead in trust. In matters of salvation, what else can we do? There is a certain degree of blindness involved. Abraham did not see the ram before he raised the knife. We do not see Christ until He comes again. “We walk by faith, not by sight,” II Corinthians 5:7. The Lord will provide after we climb the mountain, after we build the altar, after we commit ourselves in sacrifice. Trust Him.

*I know life is a test of faith, Lord. I believe You will provide. Deepen my trust. The cross comes before the crown. In the name of the Lamb, Amen.*
August 22

“We told him to stop because he was not one of us.” Mark 9:38.

Over and over, in the time of Jesus, demons are mentioned, Matthew 8:16; 10:1; 12:43-45; Mark 1:27; 3:10,11; Luke 6:17,18; 7:21. The people believed illness was caused by evil spirits. These spirits could be cast out in the name of a powerful person.

This is the background of the text under consideration. A man was using the name of Jesus to drive out evil spirits. John told the man to quit doing it. The rationale for the “cease and desist order” was based on the lack of being one of the chosen, Mark 9:38. The Lord responded with a lesson on intolerance, Mark 9:39,40.

- **Cause of intolerance.** The disciples had just argued about who among them was the greatest, Mark 9:33,34. Competition breeds jealousy, Numbers 11:22-29. Rivalry provokes a tug-of-war for pre-eminence, Philippians 1:15-18a. Loyalties become confused. However, followers of Christ should serve others, Mark 9:35. We should include them in rather than keep them out, Mark 9:36,37.

- **Attitude toward intolerance.** Everyone who invoked His name against demons damaged the kingdom of satan. Since they were not against the Lord, they were for the Lord, Mark 9:40. In other words, there were others besides His chosen who were in sympathy with His cause, John 10:16. Even their smallest gesture of cooperation should be recognized for what it was, Matthew 10:40-42.

- **Cure of intolerance.** The man casting out demons did not champion a rival organization. He was not spreading a different doctrine. The exorcist was simply doing good. His zeal was not to be discouraged. “Every good and perfect gift comes from above,” James 1:17. Casting out demons was surely one of those good gifts. It is an egregious error to cause such a one to stumble, Luke 17:1,2. A narrow, sectarian spirit does not honor the One who accepts all men, Acts 10:34-36.

“Be patient, bearing with one another in love,” Ephesians 4:2.

Once upon a time, there was a magic ring. Whoever wore it became kind. The ring was passed down from father to son. Eventually it was possessed by a man who had three sons. Two additional rings were made. The sons quarreled. Each wished to have the authentic ring. They went to a judge. The judge could not identify the magic ring. “But,” he said, “You can decide the matter. Everyone will know the true ring by the goodness of the one who wears it. Go, then, and prove you have the magic ring!” God is that ring, I John 4:7,11,12. We love outsiders so that they will love God. That is the magic of the ring, the beauty of Christian tolerance.

*Lord, wheat and chaff are stored in the same barn. Let me do the gathering. You do the sifting. May I attract rather than repel. Because You live in me, Amen.*
“Men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God,” I Corinthians 4:1.

Christians are called many things—killjoys, fruitcakes, weirdoes, misguided do-gooders, stumblebums, and such like. The labels are often negative barbs. In spite of the pain inflicted, the believer sees the labels as positive reminders. “If you are insulted because of the name of Christ,” Peter wrote, “you are blessed,” I Peter 4:14.

Certainly “a good name is more desirable than great riches” and “to be esteemed is better than silver and gold,” Proverbs 22:1; cf. Ecclesiastes 7:1a. How do we want to be remembered? We are writing our epitaph each day. Paul suggested that men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of God, I Corinthians 4:1. For such we are.

- Servants of Christ. The word “servant” originally referred to an “under rower” on a galley ship. The term is found nowhere else in the Bible. It came to mean a helper who assists a master. This is our place. We take orders and (without question) do them, Ephesians 6:5-8. We are workers not idlers. We are servants of Christ—owned by Him, responsible to Him, and judged by Him, I Corinthians 4:3-5. We are devoted to His cause, rely on His help, and speak in His name. We have only one master, Matthew 23:8.

- Stewards of God. A “steward” was often a slave to whom his master entrusted his estate, Genesis 39:2-4; cf. Matthew 25:14. It is a position of credibility, influence, and responsibility. One of the main duties of a steward was to dispense food to the members of the household, Luke 12:42-44. Hence, he dared not deviate nor try to improvise. Faithfulness was key, I Corinthians 4:2.

We are saved from past sin, set apart for future service.

As members in the household of heaven, we are servants and stewards. We are expected to follow orders and be accountable, Romans 14:10-12. There is always something we can do with the talents we have, the opportunities that come our way, Romans 12:6-8.

Christians live to serve. We do so in quiet trust and humble obedience. We discharge our responsibility in common places and in simple tasks with redemptive power. We do what we can, II Corinthians 8:12.

Let us make our “calling and election sure,” II Peter 1:10. That includes being faithful to our Master, loyal to His word, and concerned for the people He sends our way. But “who is equal to such a task?” II Corinthians 2:16b. Were we not reborn for such an assignment? Is that not our calling? Let us arise. It is time to get busy.

Father above, You are my Lord and my Master. I know my place. I accept my task. I endeavor to be faithful. That is my life. In Your Son, Amen.
“God is with you,” Zechariah 8:23.

Life can be a baffling journey. The road is often dark and difficult. Where is God when we need Him? Why does He hide His face? Isaiah 45:15. He steps back when we step away from His presence, Deuteronomy 31:15-18; cf. Psalms 44:23-26; Isaiah 1:13-15.

In the grip of judgment, Jehovah seems distant. Yet, when the storm passes, when the sun of His presence raises again, people near and far will reaffirm the closeness of God, Isaiah 45:14. That is the prediction of the prophets and the practice of the saints.

**In prophecy.** Zechariah 8:23. Jerusalem was in shambles when Zechariah spoke. He encouraged the people with a vision of a new Jerusalem, Zechariah 8:1-3. Senior citizens would be found in her again. Children would play in her streets, Zechariah 8:4,5. The destroyed city would be rebuilt. Exiles would return from far-off places, Zechariah 8:6-8. The future was bright. Jehovah had been angry with Jerusalem, but the people repented. God would return to them again, Zechariah 8:9-13. Righteousness would be found among them once more, Zechariah 8:14-17. God would be with them, Isaiah 8:17; cf. Jeremiah 14:7-9.

**In practice.** I Corinthians 14:24,25. The apostle Paul was concerned about the conduct of the Church during worship. If a stranger came into the assembly where unintelligible words were spoken, the stranger would think the brethren were insane, I Corinthians 14:23. That was not good. Christian worship should be understandable to the outsider. It should convict him of his sin and convince him that God is present, I Corinthians 14:24,25. Worship should confront God. And, when that happens, the words of Zechariah become true: “God is really among you!”

The Lord revealed Himself throughout the ages. He spoke to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He made Himself known to Moses, Samuel, and David. He revealed Himself in nature and (most convincingly) in Jesus, John 14:8-10. He promised to be with us always, Matthew 28:20b. Still, at times, from a human vantage point, He seems to hide Himself. His hand is unseen, His touch is unfelt. Israel did not comprehend what Jehovah was doing to her. The purpose of His judgments was misunderstood until later times.

A frowning face obscured a yearning heart.

Israel was brought low. Yet, distress is no proof of His absence. His people thought He had forgotten them until He came in redeeming grace, Psalms 50:14,15. He proved Himself to be a safe refuge and a faithful friend. He is a light shining in the darkness. He leads us to the new Jerusalem. In that happy city, all believers will be with Him forever, Revelation 21:1-4. Praise the Lord!

*I long to be with You, Lord, to see Your face, to hear Your voice, to sit on Your lap. I want to ask all those questions for which I have no answers. I press on. The new Jerusalem is just ahead. Through Jesus Christ, the revelation of God, Amen.*
August 25

“I know, O Lord, that a man’s life is not his own, it is not for man to direct his steps,” Jeremiah 10:23.

The exile is mentioned repeatedly in the Old Testament. It was a traumatic, life changing event. No one was excluded. Everything was altered. Though the circumstances were different, faith was challenged in ways parallel to contemporary times.

The fate of Israel was in the balance. She would soon be tossed out of her homeland, Jeremiah 10:17,18. An enemy from the north was coming, Jeremiah 10:22. Like all disasters, this tragedy taught two important lessons.

- **Life is beyond understanding.** The prophet confessed his dependence on the Lord. “I know,” he said, “a man’s life is not his own.” God is the pilot. Man is the passenger, Proverbs 20:24. Human judgment is faulty. We are liable to be deceived by appearances, blinded by feelings, misled by the forces of bias. The complexity of life is beyond human comprehension. As Job admitted, after confidently explaining his situation, “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know,” Job 42:3b. No one has the power to determine the course of his existence. We are not the master of our movements. We often end up where we did not intend to go. We are free to choose but have little control over the outcome, Proverbs 14:12.

- **Man needs divine guidance.** Since our judgments are faulty, our impulses misleading, and our powers limited, should we not look outside ourselves for assistance? “Trust in the Lord with all your heart,” Solomon said, “and lean not upon your own understanding.” In other words, “in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight,” Proverbs 3:5,6. The power that governs life is hidden. Yet those who follow His instructions will eventually make sense of His working, Psalms 25:14. He shows us His ways, leads us in His paths, and guides us to His truths. Our hope rests in Him all day long, Psalms 25:4,5. Though our situation may be dire, we will not get lost if we carefully follow His directions.

    Man can try. God will succeed.

The prophet said, “I know,” Jeremiah 10:23a. He knew from experience that life was beyond human understanding. He knew from living that man needed divine direction, Psalms 31:3; 32:8; 73:24; Isaiah 58:11. We spare ourselves much anxiety and shame when we allow the Lord to show us the way. The perils along the path are well known. God provides the map. Divine guidance illuminates the way, Psalms 119:105. As believers, we have agreed “to walk in His ways,” Deuteronomy 26:17. Anything less is simply not enough.

Sovereign God, I do not comprehend life nor understand myself. You alone can resolve the mystery of my situation. I look to You for guidance. You know the way. With profound gratitude, I pray, in His merciful name, Amen.
“God does not show favoritism,” Acts 10:34.

Everyone has his preference. Whether the subject is food, movies, books, hairstyles, clothes, pets, or paintings, a personal choice is common. It is a fact of life. If those choices remain an individual whim, no one is hurt. However, when bias bleeds over into the realm of people, a harmless preference becomes a hurtful prejudice. To favor one race in deference to another, one child over another, or one neighbor instead of another is to affront a fellow human being.

God is not biased. He is not prejudiced. He harbors no favoritism, Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25. And Jesus demonstrated a similar integrity, Mark 12:14. Regardless of class, clan, or color, everyone was treated with equality, Deuteronomy 10:17; II Chronicles 19:7; Job 34:18,19; I Peter 1:17. He accepted all people, Acts 10:34; Romans 3:21,22. We should, too.

“My brothers, as believers..., don’t show favoritism,” James 2:1.

• **The evidence.** Jehovah is the Creator of all nationalities. Though He chose Israel for a special purpose, He interacted with people outside the Hebrew nation, John 10:16. Melchizedek, a non-Jew, was a priest of God Most High, Genesis 14:18-20. Balaam, a pagan sorcerer, in a distant country, was guided by the Almighty, Numbers 22:20. In the land of Uz, far from Palestine, Job, a good man, was blessed because he feared God, Job 1:1; 42:10.

• **The lesson.** The Lord is not a respecter of persons. Again and again, His actions stand as a warning against a narrow, parochial point of view. As much as they have opportunity, His followers should “do good to all people,” Galatians 6:10; cf. Proverbs 3:27. God is an international deity. He delights in exercising compassion and clemency toward all men. He does not want anyone to perish, II Peter 3:9.

Naaman, a Syrian, was cleansed of leprosy while many in Israel, with the same disease, remained ill, Luke 4:27. The Lord spared the people in Nineveh because He was concerned for them, Jonah 3:10. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was chosen by God to do an errand for Him, Jeremiah 25:9a. Cyrus, a Persian, was given all the kingdoms of the earth and asked to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem for the Lord, Ezra 1:2.

This does not negate His wrath toward sinners. It merely slows down the threatened penalty, delays the inevitable consequences. Everyone will stand on level ground before His throne of judgment, Romans 14:10. God “will give to each person according to what he has done,” Romans 2:6. Hence, “let us make every effort to live in peace with all men,” Hebrews 12:14. God does. He expects us to do the same, I John 4:21.

Lord, I realize I have some growing to do. You ask me to reach higher, to think deeper, and to love wider. My world is divided by race and segregated by class. The call to be impartial is not easy. It requires Your heart. Through Him, who is Lord of all, Amen.
“He is your praise,” Deuteronomy 10:21.

Praise is an expression of warm approval, of heartfelt admiration. It is the voice of esteem for the virtues and accomplishments of another. In reference to God, it is a pronouncement of honor, an act of veneration. Therefore, the Lord was described as “the praise of Israel,” Psalms 22:3; cf. Exodus 15:2; Psalms 101:1; Jeremiah 17:14. God was the ground of their confidence, the reason for their joy, and the basis of their worship.

- **We praise Him for who He is.** He is the God of gods, Lord of lords, and King of kings, Deuteronomy 10:17; cf. I Timothy 6:15. He is the uncreated Creator—the absolute, unlimited, and all-knowing One. He is the standard of righteousness, the epitome of truth, and the path to everlasting life. “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth,” Psalms 8:1. He is a “great, mighty, and awesome God,” Nehemiah 9:32. With His breath He created life and with His breath He destroyed life. There is no other God like Him, Exodus 15:11; Psalms 70:19; 86:8; 89:6; Jeremiah 10:6,7.

- **We praise Him for how He treats us.** There is nothing in man that requires Him to love us. He loves because He is love, I John 4:16b. It is His condescending grace that excites our perpetual surprise. He loves the unlovely, cares for the careless, and blesses those who do not deserve blessing, Deuteronomy 10:15. He treats us as His treasure, “the apple of His eye,” Deuteronomy 32:10. The Lord “withholds no good thing” from His own, Psalms 84:11. He calls them precious and pledges to share His home with them throughout eternity. No wonder His people praise His name forever, Psalms 44:8.

- **We praise Him for what He wants us to do.** Because He is the King of kings, He has the authority to command. Because He is the Creator, He has the right to lay claim on all we are and all we have. To yield to His will—as our chart and compass—is the simplest duty, the grandest privilege, Deuteronomy 10:16,17. How amazing that He pays attention to us! Psalms 8:3,4. What an honor that He invites us into His presence! A loving Father makes a dutiful child. His unceasing kindness toward us calls for a kindly response toward Him. “We love because He first loved us,” I John 4:19.

> “Praise awaits You, O God, in Zion; to You our vows will be fulfilled,” Psalms 65:1.

The Lord has not reached the end of His power or the completion of His intentions. Who He is is not fully known. What He has done is merely a sample of what He will do. There is more to come. A mother lode of good is in store for every believer. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him,” I Corinthians 2:9. Hence, our praise should be as boundless as His promises.

> Truly, Lord, You are my praise. I will never find the farthest limit of Your love. How can my worship be so sparse, so sporadic, so shallow? May I reach deeper, as I climb higher, in my devotion to You. In the One, who I praise, Amen.
While in Babylonian exile, the prophet, in a vision, is given a guided tour of the temple in Jerusalem, Ezekiel 8:1-3. It was not a pretty sight, Ezekiel 8:6. The sanctuary was filled with pagan idols, Ezekiel 8:10,11,14,16. The idolaters made excuses, Ezekiel 8:12.

But God was there, Ezekiel 8:4. He saw their mischief—trifling with the commandments of heaven, filling the land with violence, Ezekiel 8:17. The Lord had no pity, Ezekiel 8:18. The hammer of His justice was ready to strike.

Humans often treat sin casually. With a shrug, they say, “Who cares?” God is upset by such a cavalier attitude. “Is it a trivial matter for the house of Judah to do the detestable things they are doing?” The word “trivial” meant “small,” I Samuel 18:23, or “simple,” II Kings 20:10. Should we look at sin—large or small—as a simple matter?


- **Trivial view of sin.** Why do sinners make light of their sin? It is an excuse. The guilty plead “not guilty” simply to save themselves. Dark minds invent devious schemes to exonerate their mischief, Romans 1:21-23. They try to persuade others that they are not as bad as they appear, Romans 1:18. Their wish is the father of their delusion. They get used to the filth of sin, stop seeing its ugliness, II Peter 2:22. Calvary is obscured. The devil wins.

- **Correct estimate of sin.** Wickedness is inexcusable. Sinners know better, James 4:17. Israel had the commandments. They were well aware that idolatry was wrong, Exodus 20:4. Their alibis were futile. Their rationalizations were meaningless. Sin is sin. Disobedience is disobedience. Wrong is wrong. The contagion of iniquity seeped into every fiber of life. It grew worse and worse, Isaiah 30:1. Every restraint was broken. All sense of shame died.

- **Harsh punishment of sin.** Their wickedness provoked God, Ezekiel 8:17. Their idolatry exasperated Him. “Therefore,” He said, “I will deal with them in anger; I will not look on them with pity or spare them. Although they shout in my ears, I will not listen to them,” Ezekiel 8:18. Enough was enough. The people would get what they deserved, Ezekiel 9:9,10. Patience ended. Judgment began, Jeremiah 7:9-11; Zephaniah 3:1-5.

Judgment is a repayment—the reward for evil, Ezekiel 7:4. Grace is suspended. Justice steps forward. Sinners will cry for help like the guilty beg for mercy. It will be too little, too late. It will be unacceptable, Proverbs 1:24-31. Now is the time to mend our ways. Now is the acceptable hour, Psalms 69:13; cf. II Corinthians 6:1,2.

Lord, it is a fearful thing to dilly-dally with sin. Its influence is silent, steady, and insidious. Its corrosion destroys the soul. Keep me from evil. I want no part of it. In the holy name of Jesus, Amen.
August 29

“If God is for us, who can be against us?” Romans 8:31.

One word sums up all the elements that influence the life of a believer. That word is “this.” Paul said, “What, then, shall we say in response to this?” Romans 8:31a. “This” refers to what he had already written.

The apostle had mentioned the anguish to which saints are subject, the glory by which they are transformed. Certainly the believers are not immune to suffering, Romans 8:17. Yet, these present sufferings bear no resemblance to their future glory, Romans 8:18.

So the world waits—anticipating the redemption of the saints, Romans 8:22-25. Within our present experience, it is possible to see the hand of God at work, Romans 8:28-30. What is in His eternal plan will certainly come to pass.

Such is the background of the question in the text. If “this” is true, what should every believer say about life as we know it? Paul suggests an appropriate reply: “If God is for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:31.

- **Uncertainties of life.** What does the future hold? Likely we will face a multitude of difficulties—loss of income, loss of health, and loss of loved ones. Still Paul was convinced that God would supply our needs, Romans 8:32. We can face an uncertain future with absolute certainty, Romans 8:35,37. Let come what may—countless foes, numberless misfortunes, and endless difficulties—God is greater. He is by our side. Beyond all doubt, of that we can be sure, Romans 8:38,39.

- **Certainties of God.** In spite of the uncertainties, there is much we can confidently expect. The future is full of promise. As certain as the sun will rise in the east, we can fully rely on Jesus to intercede for us, Romans 8:34. Though there may be trials, there will be blessings, I Peter 1:7. Therefore, in the time of hardship, the saints “commit themselves to their faithful Creator,” I Peter 4:19. He is with us through thick and thin, Numbers 14:9; Psalms 118:6; Isaiah 8:10; 41:10; Haggai 1:13; Hebrews 13:6.

Why is it easier to trust God for our salvation than for our daily needs?

The conviction of His goodness rests on our experience of redemption, Romans 8:32. If God has already gone beyond the limits of generosity, why would He withhold His grace now? Because we have received the greater gift, will He deny us the lesser gift? No! We have the down payment in forgiveness. He guarantees to provide the full reward in redemption, II Corinthians 5:5.

*Father, why need I worry? You have already shown me Your intentions. Your consistency inspires my faithfulness. Thanks for being there when I need You. In Him, who sustains me, Amen.*
“I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask Him for a safe journey…,” Ezra 8:21.

Civil leaders in Israel often ordered a fast in dangerous situations, II Chronicles 20:1-4. Ezra was about to embark on a long and hazardous journey. A richly laden caravan would be easy prey for bandits along the way, Ezra 8:24-27. The exiles asked for a prosperous and unimpeded return to Jerusalem, Ezra 8:21.

Ezra “was ashamed to ask the king” for protection, Ezra 8:22. He firmly believed “the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him,” II Chronicles 16:9; cf. Psalms 20:7; 46:1; Romans 8:31. So the people abandoned ordinary pleasures to seek their refuge from heaven, Psalms 36:7.

• Purpose of the fast. The perils ahead called for careful preparation. The travelers were like “lambs among wolves,” Luke 10:3. The treachery was real. They needed to fortify themselves. There were “enemies on the road,” Ezra 8:22. For the same reason, we need to “humble ourselves before God and ask Him for a safe journey.”

• Motive of the fast. Ezra was courageous but cautious. Much was at stake. The people and their possessions were vulnerable. Ezra could have acquired a military escort. He preferred to demonstrate his faith in God, Ezra 8:22,23. He knew that those who seek God will find Him, I Chronicles 28:9; cf. I Chronicles 16:10,11; Isaiah 55:6,7. In order to avoid a disaster along the way, Israel humbled herself and repented of her sin. Fasting without repentance is a useless gesture of piety, Isaiah 58:1-7.

• Result of the fast. The people fasted and prayed. The Lord responded, Ezra 8:23. Prayer was often joined with fasting, Nehemiah 1:4; Daniel 9:3. The success of their journey proved the benefit of their petition. The hand of God was on them, Ezra 8:31. The lurking enemy was kept at bay. After a four month trek, they safely arrived in Jerusalem, Ezra 8:32.

“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective,” James 5:16b.

This text (Ezra 8:21) was the basis of a farewell message delivered to the Mayflower pilgrims on the eve of their departure for the New World. In the fall of 1620, these brave souls faced the uncertainties of the North Atlantic. Their journey was longer and riskier than that of Ezra. Nevertheless, with an abundance of prayer and tears, they left their safe haven in Europe for the unknown wilderness of America. The rest is history. The “hand of God” was with them just like it was with Ezra, Ezra 7:8,9; cf. Psalms 17:6-8; John 10:28,29. What a God! What a blessing!

Sovereign Lord, I am in good hands when I put my faith in You. Eternity will prove the rightness of my trust. I pray for a safe journey to the realms above. Into Your hands I commit my soul, Amen.

There is a difference between worldly wisdom and heavenly wisdom, James 3:13-17. When this distinction is forgotten, the parable of the unscrupulous manager is misunderstood. The manager acted “shrewdly,” Luke 16:8a. He was very clever in terms of worldly wisdom.

Though called a foolish squanderer, he was actually a wise investor.

Jesus did not praise cleverness that neglected honesty. No amount of material success can compensate for spiritual failure, Psalms 49:5-9. Unprincipled ambition leads to disgrace, I Timothy 6:9.

The aim of the manager was to help others.

The Lord recommended ingenuity with integrity, Luke 16:9. He counseled us to put our money to good purpose. Instead of buying friendship, we should generously give to the needy (without expectation of return), Luke 14:12-14.

- **Responsibility.** The relationship of the manager with the rich man is similar to the connection we have with the Lord, Luke 16:1,2. We are given a stewardship of goods that are owned by God, Luke 19:12,13. Our talents and skills are from Him. They are to be used for Him. We must not waste them on selfish interests and intemperate behavior. They belong to God, I Timothy 6:7.

- **Obedience.** Believers should “give careful thought” to their ways, Haggai 1:5,6. There is much to learn in the stewardship of possessions, Luke 16:8b. Those who work for the perishable things of this world are more intense than those who seek the imperishable things of eternity, Luke 16:9. Their self-interest puts our God-interest to shame. How few of us use what we have to advance His cause! We keep it as if it was ours. Paul said, “As you wish to excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness, and in your love—see that you also excel in this grace of giving,” II Corinthians 8:7.

- **Service.** Christians “cannot serve both God and money,” Luke 16:13. A choice is required. Ultimate loyalty belongs to God alone. Money must be our servant. Otherwise, it will become our master. The soul that is enslaved by money will have much misery, Luke 16:19-25; cf. I Timothy 6:10. If we are not trustworthy in properly handling worldly wealth, we will certainly not be given heavenly riches, Luke 16:11. In other words, we will not make ends meet unless we put God in the middle.

Father, You own all things. I am the manager of a few things. My responsibility is clear. Soon I must give an account of my management. I want to serve faithfully in view of that day. In Him, who told me so, Amen.
“Thus far has the Lord helped us,” I Samuel 7:12.

Israel wandered away from God. She was asked to prove her desire to return. She was commanded to rid herself of her idols, I Samuel 7:2,3. She took immediate action. The Jews stopped worshipping false gods, I Samuel 7:4.

Israel dealt with her sins. She avoided the fierce anger of God, II Chronicles 30:8. The people longed to be reunited with Jehovah, I Samuel 7:5; cf. Hosea 14:1-3. His response was as immediate as her remorse.

Repentance requires enough sorrow for sin to quite sinning.

God heard her confession, Proverbs 28:13. The Philistines also “heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah,” I Samuel 7:7. The Philistines attacked. God intervened, I Samuel 7:10. He was merciful, Psalms 86:5. The people were grateful. They acknowledged His help, I Samuel 7:12,13. This remarkable episode is pregnant with practical advice.

• The purpose of life. Sin must be abandoned. A sincere, frank and complete confession is required, Psalms 25:11; 32:3-5. As a rule, the more specific the repentance the greater the sense of pardon. No soul can reach heaven apart from the forgiveness of sin. We must realize we are “like water spilled on the ground,” II Samuel 14:14; cf. I Samuel 7:6. Recognizing our helplessness is a big step in seeking the help of God, Daniel 4:27. And, when the grace of God is received, we, like Israel, must “fight the good fight” as long as our opponents stand in the way.

• The encouragement to persevere. The raising of the Ebenezer stone was a reminder of the past and a suggestion for the future, I Samuel 7:12. God was with them. The power of the enemy was broken, I Samuel 7:13. Peace with her neighbors was restored, I Samuel 7:14. “When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him,” Proverbs 16:7. Religious revival always has a positive influence on the social behavior of people. An inner renewal gives them strength to press on toward the goal, Philippians 3:13,14. Each step heavenward offers a clearer view of the prize awaiting those who persevere.

Appreciation for the help of God stirs hope for the future. Past accomplishments cheer us on. All of us should set up an Ebenezer stone in our life. We need the reminder. It is imperative for us to review our past, to discover the times and places where “the Lord helped us.” We do not walk alone. He promises to be with us all the way to the very end, Matthew 28:20b.

What an absolute joy to have my Ebenezer!
Thank you, Lord. I cannot make it on my own. Because You have assisted me thus far,
I am confident You will help me the rest of the way. In Christ Jesus, my stone of help, Amen.
“Remember those earlier days after you received the light, when you stood your ground,” Hebrews 10:32.

The author of Hebrews reminds his readers of their first love, Revelation 2:4,5. In the initial days of faith, they bravely endured persecution. After the death of Stephen, Acts 8:1, under Herod Agrippa, Acts 12:1-4, at Thessalonica, I Thessalonians 2:14, in Rome, Romans 12:12,14, and elsewhere, the Jewish believers were fiercely opposed.

Their suffering tested their resolve. They bore unjust indignity with uncommon valor. These courageous saints were persuaded that their true and permanent treasure was in heaven, Hebrews 10:33,34; cf. Hebrews 11:16; I Peter 1:3-5. They did not allow their present agony to dim their future joy.

• **Remember the past.** Christians were “publicly insulted,” Hebrews 10:33. The shame of being “made a spectacle” was intense, I Corinthians 4:9. Enemies of the faithful went to great lengths to tarnish the name of believers, Psalms 41:5-9. They arrested the saints and took their possessions, Hebrews 10:34. Amidst their afflictions, the followers of Christ were asked to “remember the earlier days” when they turned to Jesus and embraced Christianity. They endured hardships. They stood their ground, Philippians 1:29,30; I Thessalonians 2:2. They had conquered the adversary once. What would hinder them from doing so again?

• **Consider the present.** These saints were in the throes of severe trials. They would suffer for some time to come, Hebrews 12:1-3. They should remember the victory of yesterday to fortify themselves for the battle of tomorrow. This is not intended to be an occasional exercise but a constant habit of faith, Hebrews 13:3. To begin in trust, but forsake the faith, renders all the initial effort vain, I Corinthians 15:2; II Corinthians 6:1. The Hebrew saints had already suffered far too much to abandon the cause for which they were being called upon to suffer even more. They must not lose what they had gained, Hebrews 6:4-6. Why allow their past endurance to count for nothing?

If Christ is not worth dying for, He is not worth living for.

God helped them in the past. He would not forsake them in the future. He can be trusted, cf. I Samuel 17:32-37. He keeps His promises, Hebrews 10:35,36. In the great conflicts of life, we must decide on whom we will rely. There are only two choices: God or man. If illuminated by the light of heaven, the decision becomes easier. Christians “hold unswervingly” to the Lord, Hebrews 10:23. He lifts us above the danger of exchanging the eternal for the temporal. Why look elsewhere for assistance?

*I must focus, Lord, on things above and not on things below. The earth will soon pass away. All of my possessions will disappear. Only You will remain. I will make my decisions accordingly. In Him, who protects me, Amen.*
“Make us glad,” Psalms 90:15.

Life is short, a brief journey, Psalms 90:10. Human existence is like desert grass. It sprouts in the dawn and withers by dusk, Psalms 90:5,6. It is a dream, a watch in the night. It quickly fades out of sight—like a morning mist—never to return. And, unfortunately, this momentary span is filled with terror and tears, Psalms 90:7-9. Pessimism lurks in the shades. Melancholy is close at hand.

Yet the believer has hope. He calls for God. He knows that the grace of heaven will bring gladness, Psalms 90:13,14. The Lord is in control. He will teach His servants wisdom so they can navigate the rough bumps of life, Psalms 90:12. Then, with the favor of God, even the frail works of man will have meaning, Psalms 90:17.

The joy of the Lord is our strength, Nehemiah 8:10. He may seem to hide for awhile. Yet His compassion will reappear—like the sun after a storm. His frowning face will always give way to a happy smile, Psalms 30:5; Isaiah 12:1.

- **The Lord is our dwelling place.** As weary wanderers, we do not have a settled abode on earth. We are strangers passing through the night. Though here today and gone tomorrow, we have a refuge, a home on high, John 14:1-3. Heaven is our destination. Glory is our permanent address. Here we experience perpetual peril. There we will have perfect peace. Here we deal with the coldness of cunning men. There we will be wrapped in the unfailing warmth of eternal love. God is our dwelling place forever, Psalms 90:1,2.

- **He will make us glad.** There is no way to overestimate the blessing of His joy. It sweetens life, encourages work, heals heartache, and gives hope. A kind word, Proverbs 12:25, a wise son, Proverbs 15:20, and a fragrant perfume, Proverbs 27:9, can temporarily cheer the heart. But the gladness of God is greater than all of them. In Him, we can be happy “all of our days,” Psalms 90:14. The fool seeks mirth in frivolous merrymaking. Such is meaningless. It peaks and wanes like burning nettles—flash to ash in a moment, Ecclesiastes 7:6.

The world has pleasure. The Christian has joy.

The secret of a lasting joy is in seeing God, Psalms 90:16. It is based on knowing He is not an irresponsible power but a compassionate parent, Psalms 103:13-18. Christian happiness is more than a confidence that “the best is yet to be.” It is a realization that the best is here right now. It is rejoicing in the Lord always. It is the “peace of God which transcends all understanding.” It guides our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ today, tomorrow, and for evermore, Philippians 4:4,7.

Lord, life is good. In spite of dark clouds, the sun still shines. You are my joy. I do not wait for later. I rejoice now. Through Him, who is my happiness, Amen.
“You will be for Me a kingdom of priests,” Exodus 19:6.

Three months after leaving Egypt, Israel camped at Mt. Sinai, Exodus 19:1,2. The children of God were aware what they had left behind. They were not aware of what was up ahead. The confusion of their circumstances was about to be clarified. In the space of one sweeping verse, the future of Israel was made known, Exodus 19:6.

At that time, the Israelites were a group of nomadic vagabonds. They had no country. They were regarded as intruders, second class citizens. But God called them His “treasured possession,” Exodus 19:5; cf. Psalms 135:4; Isaiah 43:1-4; Malachi 3:17. As such, these ex-slaves were soon to serve in two important capacities.

- **Kings.** Without the intervention of God, Israel would have remained in slavery. And we, too, would be in bondage to sin, controlled by our passions, Ephesians 2:1-3. Without the intervention of God, we would be slaves to our opinions, prisoners of our thoughts, alienated from God because of our evil behavior, Colossians 1:21. But, like Israel, when we realize our true destiny, we become “kings,” I Corinthians 4:8. Once believers show themselves to be genuine followers of God, He will treat them as royalty. The saints will reign with Christ both here and in the hereafter, Revelation 5:9,10; 20:4,6; 22:4,5.

- **Priests.** The priests were committed to the Lord. Israel was a “kingdom of priests,” Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 61:6. Priests had intimate access to God. They were intermediaries. Israel did not need a go-between because she was a go-between. Jehovah set Israel apart from other nations “so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God,” I Kings 8:59-61. This was her cause. It is also the purpose of the Church, I Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:5b,6. We are “anointed” of God, I John 2:20. We “enter the Most Holy place,” Hebrews 10:19. As intermediaries, we are to bring the world to the Lord, Acts 26:17,18.

It is not what we were but what we are the defines what we do.

Israel was not to identify herself with her past. Neither should we, Colossians 1:21-23a. The Lord reminded Israel that she was once like a helpless baby eagle. God carried her, brought her to Himself, Exodus 19:4. Her privileged status was His doing not her accomplishment. Since that was so, could she not trust Him? Should she not believe His promises, obey His commands? Over three thousand years later, we can say, “God has kept His word!” He has never failed, disappointed, nor forgotten, Numbers 23:19; cf. Hebrews 6:16-19a. Therefore, as kings and priests, we should serve Him faithfully.

*Oh Lord, help me grasp my new identity, discharge my responsibility. Though I am a king and a priest, I did not earn these positions. They were given to me. You have kept Your word. May I keep my charge. In the name of the King of kings, the eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ my Lord, Amen.*
“The people willingly offer themselves,” Judges 5:2.

Where there is a will, there is a way. The secret of success in any religious endeavor is finding “willing volunteers,” Judges 5:9. The minority who are favorably inclined is more helpful than the majority who could care less. Great things happen when an eager willingness is coupled with an ample energy to finish a worthy enterprise, II Corinthians 8:11.

An unforced exercise of the will was an essential element in building the tabernacle. Moses asked for gifts—gifts prompted by the heart of the giver, Exodus 25:1,2. Those who were “willing” brought more than enough, Exodus 35:29; 36:6,7.

“God loves a cheerful giver,” II Corinthians 9:7.

A willing spirit was also key to the construction of the temple, I Chronicles 28:21; cf. I Chronicles 29:3-5,9. Yet, with all of the generosity, there was a need for integrity, a need to give with “honest intent,” I Chronicles 29:17; cf. Acts 5:1-6. God knows our motives, I Samuel 16:7; Psalms 7:9; Jeremiah 17:10. Do we give willingly and honestly?

• **The spirit of willingness.** People give of themselves when personal aims and interests are laid aside. They serve God because they have abandoned themselves. Their whole heart is given in devotion to the Lord, Deuteronomy 10:12. A choice is required. God must come first. Half measures are unacceptable, Psalms 119:2. The progress of the faith has suffered because the Church is often double minded, James 1:8. The success of any religious movement can be traced back to the self-sacrifice of a few. It is what draws people to Calvary, John 12:32. Throughout the centuries, it has inspired the poet and moved the orator to extol its praise. A willing heart is a beautiful thing.

• **The inspiration to volunteer.** God is the electricity in spiritual commitment. His grandeur stirs the souls of men to serve. He is the fire that burns in the bones of the faithful, Jeremiah 20:9. The life blood of Christian ministry is “for His sake,” II Corinthians 4:5,11; 12:10; III John 7. The saints pray for such a single minded devotion to God, Psalms 51:12. They know the Lord is not satisfied with our gifts alone. He asks for our hearts, Proverbs 23:26. Like the apostle Paul, God does not want our possessions. He wants us! II Corinthians 12:14. Gifts are acceptable when the giver gives himself first, II Corinthians 8:5. Self-sacrifice pleases God. It is an act of worship, Romans 12:1.

The Lord allows us to choose. He refuses to compel. He refrains from force. All soldiers in His service are volunteers. No mercenaries are enlisted. We love because He loved, I John 4:19. We give because He gave, Romans 5:8. The foundation of a willing heart is gratitude, II Corinthians 5:15. Are we grateful? It is time that we demonstrate it!

*Lord, I admit that it is easy for me to be full of me. Struggle as I may, self wants to be first. Help me stay focused on You. Then I can have a willing heart. In Him, who is the model of selflessness, Amen.*
“After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” Galatians 3:3.

The cross is central to the Christian faith. Calvary rescues us from the condemnation of sin, Galatians 1:3,4. It is Christ who justifies, Galatians 2:15,16. If righteousness could be gained by keeping the law, obviously “Christ died for nothing,” Galatians 2:21.

The apostle Paul was perplexed by the Galatians. They clearly “saw” Christ crucified, Galatians 3:1. How could they forget? Yet, in effect, they did. Their actions were the height of folly, the depth of stupidity! Did they not see His humiliation? Did they not hear His agony? “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God,” I Peter 3:18a.

Yes, they saw! Indeed, they heard! Their hearts were broken. They repented. They accepted Jesus as their Savior. At the foot of the cross, they found their Redeemer. They received the Spirit, I John 4:13. They walked in newness of life. They were saved by grace. Why, then, were they relying on works of the flesh? Ephesians 2:8,9.

Nothing great or small will do. Jesus did it all for me and you.

- **Human effort.** No works are demanded as a condition for the forgiveness of sins, Romans 3:21,22; Galatians 3:24. “Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law;” Galatians 3:25. Why were the Galatians turning back to the weak and miserable concepts of righteousness by works? Did they wish to be enslaved by them again? Galatians 4:9. Surely not! Human effort cannot “clear the conscience.” The law is merely an “external regulation.” It was kept until faith replaced works, Hebrews 9:9,10.

- **Divine Spirit.** God had given the Galatians His Spirit, Galatians 3:5. Did they receive the Spirit as a result of what they did? No! How foolish of the Galatians to think so, Galatians 3:3. The gift of the Spirit comes through faith, Galatians 3:2. In receiving the Spirit, the Galatians became the children of God, Galatians 4:6,7. They were “sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ,” Galatians 3:26,27. They did not jump any hoop, accomplish any task, or do any work. They believed, Galatians 3:11. The Lord set them free from the impossible task of earning salvation, Galatians 5:1.

The clash over faith and works is an age old struggle. It is a choice between life in the Spirit and bondage to the law. The former is a gift of grace. The latter is a yoke of slavery. A decision is required. For, if we are trying to be justified by law, we are alienated from Christ, fallen from grace, Galatians 5:4,5. The choice is ours.

*O Lord, keep me from being entangled in the hopeless demands of legalism. You have called me to freedom.*

*The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love.*

*I cling to Your grace. Through Him, who set me free, Amen.*
After many years of political weakness, Israel became a powerful empire. David saw this transformation as a blessing of God, II Samuel 22:1-4. The Lord was faithful, II Samuel 22:26-30. His kindness was worthy of generous praise, II Samuel 22:50,51.

God stooped down and made David great. The verb “stoop down” is used in several ways. It can refer to being brought low, mistreated, or humbled, Genesis 16:6; Exodus 22:22. It can describe oppressive treatment, Exodus 1:11,12, the subduing of an enemy, Numbers 24:24, or the infliction of pain, Psalms 105:18. The verb can also suggest being humble (or humbling oneself) instead of being haughty, II Samuel 22:28; Psalms 18:27; Proverbs 3:34; Zechariah 9:9.

God humbled Himself, Psalms 113:5,6. Many translators prefer to say His “gentleness” made David great. David was probably thinking of his days as keeper of sheep. He saw himself as a feeble lamb in the hands of a sovereign Shepherd. God was gentle. When harsher treatment might have been justified, He was kind.

“The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love,” Joel 2:13.

• **Condescension of God.** Jehovah dwells above. He stoops down in order to raise us up. He became human, Philippians 2:6-8. He suffered unimaginable humiliation. He traded His crown for a cross. He endured the shame. He condescended to the ghettos of sin so that we might live in the suburbs of righteousness, Hebrews 12:23. He stoops down to number the hairs on our head, Matthew 10:30. He takes care of the little stuff, sweats the details, and manages the small things. He lowers Himself to dwell in us, I Corinthians 6:19,20. He condescends to guide us through a mean and rebellious world. He bears with us when we ignore His presence, resist His encouragement, and disobey His commands. He comes to us so that we can come to Him.

• **Exaltation of man.** When the Lord bends down, He raises us up. He teaches us His ways, John 6:45. His wisdom fills our minds and enriches our lives. Only His children are privileged to have such knowledge, Matthew 11:25. Because the Lord stoops down, we can overcome the world, I John 5:4. We inherit a grand and enduring estate, I Peter 1:3,4. Since God stoops down, we are “participants in the divine nature,” II Peter 1:3,4. These are not fanciful dreams but present realities. Everyone who acknowledges Him will receive blessings from Him. The Lord humbled Himself. Therefore, we ought to humble ourselves, Mark 10:43,44. The way up is to stoop down!

Your way is different from my way, Lord. You give me victory when I surrender. You hold me up if I am willing to bow down. You make me great when I am nothing. You know best. I will follow Your lead. Thanks for showing me the way. Prayerfully, in Jesus, I say, Amen.
Some of the Corinthians were not well grounded in the faith. They had given simple assent to the truth, I Corinthians 8:2. They still needed to understand their relationship with idols, I Corinthians 8:4,7. In view of these weaker saints, the Church was given a caution: be “careful” how you conduct yourself, I Corinthians 8:9,10; cf. Mark 9:42.

Paul chose to restrict his freedom of action so that he would not offend those who were less informed. He had a right to accept Church support but refused to do so, I Corinthians 9:7-11. He put the advance of the Gospel ahead of himself, I Corinthians 9:12.

“I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible,” I Corinthians 9:19.

• **Privilege.** The apostle became all things to all people so that he might win some, I Corinthians 9:20-22. He met them on their turf. He entered their world. He made contact with them where they lived. Paul treated them with equality. He put others first. He considered it a privilege to do so.

• **Responsibility.** The apostle accommodated his behavior to influence his hearers. If a believer wants to serve men, should he not curtail his behavior out of respect for them? Galatians 5:13. The saint has a right to do many things but an obligation to reflect God in all things, II Corinthians 4:5. Paul happily exercised his freedom to preach the Gospel as a slave! I Corinthians 9:23.

• **Reward.** Why did Paul serve? Was he looking for career advancement or monetary gain? No! I Corinthians 9:17,18. His reward was a job well done. He gave because he wanted to give. To heal shattered minds, mend broken hearts, and rescue lost souls, was the hope, joy, and crown of his life, I Thessalonians 2:19,20.

• **Method.** As a matter of strategy, Paul became all things to all men. It was a case of identifying with others for their good, I Corinthians 10:31-11:1. If one cannot appreciate others—cannot listen to their point of view—he lacks the basic attitude for serving the Lord, I Peter 2:16,17.

Paul resigned his rights. He forfeited his freedoms. Freely he received. Freely he gave. He stepped into the shoes of others. He looked through their eyes. Without compromising truth or ignoring conscience, he conceded points of opinion while maintaining standards of morality. It was his privilege, responsibility, reward, and method. It should also be ours.

“Others before self for their sake” is the motto of a Christian.

*Thank you, Father, for the gift of serving others. I put them first so they can see You in me. I give so they can receive. That is what Jesus did. In His holy name, Amen.*

Israel worshipped Baal—a fertility cult god. Prostitution was central to this heathen religion, Hosea 5:1-3. Israel was hopelessly trapped. She stumbled toward her inevitable demise, Hosea 5:4,5. There was no turning back. Yet, Israel continued to bring sacrifices to Jehovah, Hosea 5:6. It was too late. The judgment of God was at hand, Hosea 5:8,9. The people were spiritually sick. There was no cure, Hosea 5:13.

- **Shallow spirituality.** The piety of Israel came in fits and spasms. It never lasted. Her spirituality was like a morning fog. It disappeared quickly, Hosea 6:4. It looked promising but failed to bear lasting fruit, cf. John 15:16. They had neither genuine conviction of God nor true turning to God. Like Sunday worship that fades before Monday work, their righteousness rapidly withered, Matthew 13:3-6.

- **Ceremonial religion.** Israel built altars. They offered sacrifices. However, they worshipped with their lips while their hearts were elsewhere, Isaiah 29:13. God wanted her words and actions to complement each other, Hosea 6:6. That is the test of a real religion, I John 3:17,18. It is the hallmark of a genuine believer, James 1:27. God hates mindless acts of devotion, Isaiah 1:13-15. In vain do men uphold orthodoxy, attend worship, and pursue works of generosity, when their hearts are absent, Isaiah 58:3b-10.

- **Superficial repentance.** When the people began to feel the wrath of God, they proposed a quick fix, Hosea 6:1,2. Their intentions were sincere but superficial. The Lord was not fooled. He knew their hearts, Amos 5:25-27. Enough was enough. Their pretended repentance was a complete sham. “Therefore,” God punished them. His judgment came like lightning—swift and powerful, Hosea 6:5.

Jesus quoted the words of Hosea twice, Matthew 9:13; 12:7. Other prophets voiced the same idea, Isaiah 1:11; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8. When the Lord asked for mercy not sacrifice, He was confronting an age old problem. Humans go to Church but they are not spiritual. They participate in ritual but are not righteous.

Worship does not finish our Christian obligation. It merely equips us to carry it out.

Religion is misunderstood. People get involved for selfish reasons. They fail to put themselves into it because they only want to get something out of it, Matthew 19:27. The aim of Christianity is being something rather than getting something. We welcome the rewards and avoid the responsibilities, seek the privilege and forget the purpose. We fail to count the cost. We start but are unable to finish, Luke 14:28-30.

*Sovereign Father, I want to be a finisher. Cleanse me of selfish ambition. May my words and my actions agree. You are the focus of my faith, the reason for my obedience. Keep me true to Your intention. In Christ Jesus, my Lord, Amen.*
“Would you condemn Me to justify yourself?” Job 40:8.

How can a good God permit evil to exist? How can a compassionate God allow the wicked to prosper? These are dangerous questions. Certainly the Lord knows how to manage the world, Job 10:1-3. But, in our confusion, we attempt to correct the Almighty, Job 40:2.

We often blame God for the evils of history, Job 9:22-24; 12:13-25; 14:18-20; 21:7-15. Hence, the Lord invites man to rule the world, Job 40:9-13. Will humans do a better job? If they do, God will be the first to acknowledge it, Job 40:14. In reality, however, man cannot even control himself, Romans 7:18,19. How, then, could he govern the universe? The wise see their folly. They turn from their arrogance, Job 42:2-6.

- **Limitations of man.** Why do men claim God is unfair? Is it not to justify themselves? Job 40:8. If man challenged the Creator to a debate, could he win the contest? Let him try! What subject would he choose? He will surely fail! For God “does great things beyond our understanding,” Job 37:5. He sends storms. He controls the clouds. He is “beyond our reach,” Job 37:23. How dare we question His wisdom by speaking about things we do not grasp, Job 38:2. We were not present at creation, Job 38:4-7. We have never supervised nature nor controlled the wicked, Job 38:12,13. We know little. We are able to do less. Why, then, should we presume to judge the rightness of God? Romans 3:3,4a.

- **Grandeur of God.** Jehovah created both humans and animals, Job 40:15. The huge and terrifying beasts tower in strength over man, Job 40:16-18. Yet these mighty creatures are but play toys in the hands of God, Job 40:19. Man cannot control them, Job 41:1-9. Why, therefore, should humans assume they can “stand against” God? Job 41:10,11. What right do they have to judge His administration of the world? If the mighty beasts are more powerful than man, what about God who rules over these monsters? If these animals look down on haughty humans, what does Jehovah God do? Job 41:33,34.

Anguish will fill man with terror because they shake their fists at God, Job 15:24,25.

The issues involved in governing the world are far greater than our human capacity to comprehend. We are totally out of place to judge divine providence. The universe is very complicated. We only understand the mere edges of His knowledge and activity. We live in a fallen world which God works day and night to superintend and to save. Only when we take our appointed place will we catch a glimpse of His compassionate control over a world in rebellion.

_I humbly bow before Your throne, Sovereign Lord. I accept Your governance, submit to Your supervision. Take control. Rule the unruly. Let Your kingdom come in all its power. On bended knee, I pray, in Jesus name, Amen._
“God did not give us a spirit of timidity,” II Timothy 1:7.

Fear is a common feeling. It is an expression of vulnerability, Genesis 3:10; Deuteronomy 5:5; I Samuel 28:5. The antidote for terror is the conviction that the Lord is present, Deuteronomy 20:3-4.

Fear is a call for a renewed hope in God, Psalms 56:3,4. Those who trust the Lord “will have no fear of bad news,” Psalms 112:7,8. Jehovah is in control. If He is for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:31.

“We wait in hope for the Lord, He is our help and our shield. In Him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in His holy name,” Psalms 33:20,21.

Trusting the Almighty is the cure for fear. It is a recognition that His plans will come to pass, Psalms 33:8-11. It is believing in His special concern for those who rely on Him, Psalms 33:18,19.

- **Conquest of fear.** Paul reminded Timothy that God did not intend for him to be afraid, II Timothy 1:7. A Christian coward is a contradiction, Revelation 21:8. Timothy was undertaking a huge task. He could easily fear failure. He had witnessed opposition to the Gospel. He knew that the greatest hurdles in proclaiming the Good News was fear of embarrassment, fear of rejection, and fear of inadequacy. These fears are real. So is God. He is bigger than our biggest fear. He has given us all we need to overcome our fright, Psalms 27:1; John 14:27; Romans 8:15; I John 4:18.

- **Call to courage.** Paul wrote to strengthen Timothy for ministry. The apostle braced his young co-laborer for the work ahead. He reminded him of his “sincere faith,” II Timothy 1:5. Surely Timothy did not want to dishonor his mother and grandmother. His family heritage was at stake, II Timothy 3:14. Furthermore, Paul reminded Timothy of his special gift, II Timothy 1:6; I Timothy 4:14. Though he faced stiff opposition, I Timothy 1:3-7; 4:6,7; II Timothy 2:14-19, the apostle told his intern to fan the flames of passion for service. Finally, Paul reminded Timothy that he was given power, love, and self-discipline, II Timothy 1:7. He was fully equipped. He could go beyond the point of endurance and still endure. He had nothing to fear but fear itself.

The time of departure for Paul was at hand, II Timothy 4:6. The memory of his life would kindle hope and strength, II Timothy 3:10,11. Timothy should recall the benefits of the Lord, cf. Psalms 103:2-5. We should, too. The past can supply the present with courage to face any challenge with unflinching resolve, Ephesians 3:16-19.

*Because You are my God, I need not be afraid. I will face obstacles as a soldier of the cross. You know my situation. You are aware of the opposition. I shall move ahead in confidence. This is my pledge, through Jesus the Lord, Amen.*
“Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plan will succeed,” Proverbs 16:3.

An aged saint was asked, “What is the key to successful Christian living?” He responded, “Commit all that you do to the Lord!” His advice is worthy of careful examination.

In every avenue of life, God should be taken into account, Jeremiah 42:3. His influence is not limited to special seasons or sacred places. He should be acknowledged in the home, at school, at work, and during play, Proverbs 3:6. In other words, the Lord is not an elective. He is life. All things are “from Him, through Him, and to Him,” Romans 11:36.

- **Guide in planning.** We make decisions according to our preferences. God weighs our choices in the balance of His will. It is like writing a letter. We guess its weight and apply the stamps. We think there is enough. However, our thoughts are not the standard. So, before putting the envelope in the mailbox, we have the postman weigh it. His scales are the official measurement. In a similar way, God is the standard of behavior, Isaiah 55:8. He has the final say about our plans, Psalms 143:10.

- **Help in doing.** Without the Lord, we face a huge, uncaring world. Without the Lord, we are subject to the whims of chance, tossed here and there by blind forces. Our ship has no rudder. But, with the Lord, there is hope, Psalms 146:5,6. In Him our plans are adjusted, our purposes made firm, Proverbs 19:21. “There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord,” Proverbs 21:30.

God overrules the actions of mankind, Psalms 33:10,11; cf. Daniel 4:34,35. Why, then, should we pray “Thy will be done” since without a doubt it will be done? (1) Prayer is our willingness to let Him shape our lives. Of course, there is value in our planning and preparation, Proverbs 21:31. But the veto of God is reserved for those plans which do not agree with His will, Proverbs 16:3. And (2) prayer is an act of commitment to God. We fool ourselves if we assume we do not need the Lord to guide us, Proverbs 20:24. God not only assists our planning but also shapes our plans, Job 33:29,30.

“Commit your way to the Lord,” Psalms 37:5.

To rely on Him requires humility—a humility that confesses He made us, Psalms 100:3. Upon Him we depend. Trusting the Lord helps us to think less highly of ourselves and more highly of Him, Romans 12:3. We do not always know what is best. We do not always have the answer, Proverbs 3:5. Bitterness and cynicism are the result of living without God, the product of relying on ourselves. Those who acknowledge Him believe the world is in good hands. Even in times of tears, they wait for the Lord, Psalms 130:5-7.

This prayer, Father, is a sign of my willingness to be molded by You. I commit my plans to Your approval. Teach me Your way. Show me the path. I wait for Your guidance. You are my only hope. I cannot succeed without You. Through Him, Amen.
“The love of most will grow cold,” Matthew 24:12.

Jesus peeked into the future, Matthew 24:25. He predicted the coming of pretenders, Matthew 24:5. These pseudo-messiahs would perform miracles, Matthew 24:24. Their deception would cause many to abandon the faith, Matthew 24:10,11.

The events described by Jesus happened to the people He addressed during their lifetime, Matthew 24:34. And, as predicted, within a few decades, some had “forsaken their first love,” Revelation 2:4. The warning, however, still applies to us today, Proverbs 23:19.

• **Evils of that time.** No difficulties were ever greater than those during the defeat of Jerusalem. It is foolish to compare our struggles to theirs. For “each day has enough trouble of its own,” Matthew 6:34. Still it is equally foolish to deny the possibility of our love growing cold. After all, it is the common lot of every generation, Job 5:7. Many times the trial of faith is long and tedious. Most of us do not face a brief hour of martyrdom but years of frustration. Such requires a stubborn endurance that makes the best of an “unjust” situation, I Peter 2:19-21.

• **Evils of this day.** There is always the temptation to exaggerate the difficulties of our day. Things seem worst than ever. Our troubles are biggest because they are closest to us. We feel them most. We know them best. And, due to their proximity to us, our burdens appear heavier. Certainly they are the ones we carry! These crises call for exceptional courage and uncommon stamina. However, it is a grave mistake to bear them alone. God can help, Psalms 68:19. Fellow saints can lend a hand, Galatians 6:2. Such assistance is given to inspire faith and energize effort. It is not given to remove the struggle but provide a way to “stand up under it,” I Corinthians 10:13.

Believers know that this world is an alien place, Colossians 3:1,2. Therefore, they do not expect it to be a safe and easy existence. Struggles test our endurance. At times, there is little we can do but stand our ground. There is no advance. The saints merely “stand,” Ephesians 6:13-15. They refuse to retreat, to let their love grow cold.

True believers turn trouble into testimony.

With dogged determination, we refuse to surrender, Luke 21:19. Trials come and go. Our resolve is deepened. Our love for God is purified. Though we begin our spiritual walk as soft clay, the fires of life hardened us into a useful brick for building His kingdom. In the interim, our steadfast allegiance becomes brighter against the dark backdrop of these evil times, Matthew 24:13.

_I recognize that struggles are good for my faith. You, Lord, know what is best for me. I will not be given more than I can bear. Thank You, for Your faithful providence. Through the holy name of my Savior, Amen._
When the city of Jericho was captured, Israel was to place the booty of war in the “treasury” of God, Joshua 6:18,19. Though the instructions were clear, the children of Israel disobeyed, Joshua 7:1. Calamity ensured. The army suffered an unexpected defeat in their next battle, Joshua 7:2-5.

The people were bewildered. How could this happen? God had promised them victory, Joshua 1:5. Where was the Lord when Israel needed Him? Why had their soldiers been “struck down” on the battlefield?

- **Holding God responsible.** The first impulse of these disheartened people was to blame God, Joshua 7:7,8. How typical of human beings! They accuse others before they blame themselves. The initial setback did not mean a final defeat, Nehemiah 9:30,31. God did not abandon His people forever, Deuteronomy 4:31; Isaiah 48:9-11.

  With unconquered faith, the saints march on.
  God may step back, but not for very long.

Still the question lingers. Why does God allow His people to suffer embarrassment? Is it not to show us the limit of our strength so we may depend on Him? Numbers 11:10-15.

- **Holding man responsible.** Israel had sinned. Their defeat was their fault. They must take responsibility. It was not a time for despair, Joshua 7:10-12. It was an opportunity to display courage, to demonstrate resolve. Jehovah had not withdrawn His presence. The reins had not slipped out of His hands. It was an occasion to be concerned for the name of God, Joshua 7:8,9.


So Israel suffered a setback. The cause was not the weakness of God but the waywardness of man. The offense had to be remedied, Joshua 7:15. When the people of God behave in a manner that dishonors His name, God will set things straight. The adjustment will not be fun but the name of the Lord will be cleared. The saints encourage God to defend His name, Psalms 74:10,11.

*Father, I revere Your name. There is none greater. Some things fail because You will not let them succeed. Your name is more important than anything I do. Defend Your name. Honor and glory belongs to You forever and ever. Through the Name above all names, Amen.*
“Making the most of every opportunity,” Ephesians 5:16.


Winning the “respect of outsiders,” I Thessalonians 4:12, having “a good reputation” among them, I Timothy 3:7, is a tall order. The world hates religious people, John 15:19. The judgment of sinners is clouded by evil. They are biased against Church-going “do-gooders.” How can the faithful stop the ignorant talk of wicked men? I Peter 2:15.

- **Obey His will.** Christians “renounce secret and shameful ways,” II Corinthians 4:2. They are “very careful” to live above reproach, Ephesians 5:16. In essence, they abandon the behavior of fools, Proverbs 15:5. Disciples “ask where the good way is and walk in it,” Jeremiah 6:16. They follow the footsteps of Jesus—turning neither to the right or the left, Proverbs 4:27. They look ahead in order to avoid disaster, Proverbs 22:3; I Thessalonians 5:21,22. Like Enoch, they “walk with God,” preferring the light, I Thessalonians 5:5, living in righteousness, I John 1:7.

- **Use every opportunity.** Fish do not always bite. The world will not always listen. Yet, now and then, here and there, a window to speak for God will open. These openings are few and far between. The believer makes the most of every opportunity, Colossians 4:5. He watches for the precise moment, the favorable juncture of circumstances to inject kind words about heavenly things, Colossians 4:6. The “days are evil,” Ephesians 5:16. They were in the first century. They are now. The followers of Christ must be vigilant, must make every effort to do good, Galatians 6:10.

  When opportunity knocks, the saints open the door.

Christians are to be “as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves,” Matthew 10:16. They live carefully. They give no offense to outsiders. They are the light of the world. The world will notice. The Father will be praised, Matthew 5:14-16.

Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, Psalms 119:1. They are faithful to their calling, II Peter 1:10. They love one another without complaining or arguing, Philippians 2:14-16. They are obedient—ready to do whatever is good, Titus 3:1. They are letters from Christ—known and read by all men, II Corinthians 3:2,3. These good folks are alert, always in prayer, making the most of every opportunity. They walk in the light, Ephesians 5:8. They do so because the world is watching!

*Lord of light, God of glory, I am thankful to know Your will. Help me walk in Your way. May Your goodness shine brightly through Your humble servant. For the sake of others,*
*I urgently beg, in His flawless name,* Amen.

The prophet lamented the sad state of society. "No upright man remains," he wrote, Micah 7:2. Friends and family turned against each other, Micah 7:5,6. The situation was utter chaos, evil in every direction, Micah 7:3.

Micah depended on God. Even if his father and mother forsook him, he was certain that the Lord would receive him, cf. Psalms 27:10. In hopeless circumstances, the faithful put their trust in Jehovah, Psalms 18:46-48; 25:4,5; 27:9; Habakkuk 3:17,18. Hence, the prophet waited for the Lord.

• **Wait.** The term “wait” signifies more than killing time in idle loitering. It carries the idea of expectant hope, confident trust, Psalms 71:14. It is more than an uncertain wish that drowns out troubles. The believer patiently waits because he knows God will respond, Isaiah 30:19. “The eyes of the Lord are on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His unfailing love,” Psalms 33:18; cf. Lamentations 3:21-24.

• **Wait in hope.** So we quietly endure, drawing strength from our intimate relationship with the Almighty. He is the One who enables us to meet the challenges of our day. In calm assurance, we accept each difficulty with firm anticipation. God has plans for us, Jeremiah 29:11-13. His plans unfold slowly. He delays for wise and gracious reasons. Therefore, instead of impatient fretting—as though something strange was happening to us—we “rest in the Lord,” Psalms 62:1,5.

• **Wait in hope for God.** It takes enormous faith to passively yield to the will of heaven. The greatest conqueror is he who controls his own spirit, Proverbs 16:32. Only the Lord can give us the courage to submit to His will. We cannot change the course of history. We cannot stop the flow of time. Things happen. Trials come. It is useless “to kick against the goads,” Acts 26:14. Stressful events are the prodding of God. He is calling us to believe, Psalms 27:1-3. Though we may be surrounded with chaos, God is in control. He is our fortress in present turmoil. He will be our strength in future victory.

“Wait for the Lord, be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord,” Psalms 27:14.

Light will break forth. Healing will come. All will be well again, Isaiah 25:9. Christian hope does not rise from a desperate imagination. It is solidly fixed on the unfailing promise of God, Isaiah 51:4-6. Micah was certain that Jehovah would act, confident all would be well. Micah resolved to remain faithful. “Though I sit in darkness,” he said, “the Lord will be my light,” Micah 7:8b. Let us, then, lift up our heads. Redemption draws near. “Salvation is nearer now than when we first believed,” Romans 13:11.

There is nothing, Father, greater than You. No event, no situation, no condition can unravel Your will. This I believe. In this I trust. Do what must be done. I will wait for Your salvation. In Christ, my Savior, Amen.
Cain and Abel were the first brothers in history. They had no neighbors, no friends, and no siblings. Their family was their entire circle of fellowship. It might be assumed, then, that they would instinctively look out for one another—to protect and preserve each other.

- **Brothers at work.** These young men pursued honorable vocations. They busied themselves in flocks and fields, Genesis 4:2b. Their occupations contributed to their mutual welfare. Toil was now a necessity for survival, Genesis 3:17-19. Cain and Abel were bound together by their need for food and companionship.

- **Brothers in worship.** Born in the same home, trained by the same parents, devoted to the same God, they were brothers in worship, Genesis 4:3,4a. Their offerings were connected with—and probably suggested by—their employment. This was natural, appropriate, and acceptable. They were brothers in faith. But something happened. Cain became angry, Genesis 4:4b-5. Sin crouched at his door, Genesis 4:6,7. He did evil, I John 3:12; cf. Proverbs 21:27. Though occupying the same pew, their worship was as different as night is from day, Hebrews 11:4.

- **Brothers at odds.** Cain killed Abel. Brotherly love died. Fraternal affection was smashed, Genesis 4:8. As brothers, they should have had a pleasant relationship; Psalms 133:1. Envy came between them. Anger caused division. Sadly, such mischief grew out of religion. What should have brought them together tore them apart! Bloodshed ensued, Proverbs 29:10. The first worship service became an occasion of sin.

- **Brothers before God.** Both men stood in the presence of the Lord. Both were judged. One was approved. The other was condemned. Cain offered a feeble excuse. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Genesis 4:9. To “keep” meant “to care for,” Genesis 2:15; 30:31; II Samuel 15:16. Cain believed that everyone should take care of himself. Such self-centeredness is the age old justification for evil, James 3:13-16.

Beware! Cain happily harvested his crops. He innocently offered the fruits of his labor. He had no thought of murder. However, while in “Church,” the devil pounced on him. In an unguarded moment, selfishness resulted in the unthinkable, cf. Proverbs 22:24,25.

> “Live in peace with each other,” I Thessalonians 5:13.

The warnings of God deserve the attention of men. Jesus urged us to be reconciled with an alienated brother before offering a gift at the altar, Matthew 5:23,24. We can have pious parents, a good home, an honorable calling, and a religious profession but still be lost if we fail to love our brother, I John 2:10,11; 3:10; 4:20,21.

I am my brother’s keeper, Lord. May I respect his opinion, protect his reputation, and honor his goodness. We need each other. In the name of my Brother, Amen.
Jerusalem was buzzing with excitement. A carpenter from Nazareth claimed to be the long awaited Messiah. The religious authorities rejected Him. He seemed too meek and mild. Though He did some amazing things, He was crucified as a crazy pretender.

His disciples said He came back from the dead. It sounded too good to be true. The Jewish high court called it an empty rumor. There had been similar deceivers. However, hundreds of people swore they saw Him alive. They touched Him, talked to Him, and ate with Him. Could He have come back to life? The air was full of claims and counter claims. What really happened? What should one believe?

His miracles demonstrated the approval of heaven, Acts 2:22. His crucifixion was part of a predetermined, divine plan, Acts 2:23. His resurrection was a certainty. Death could not keep Him in the grave, Acts 2:24. A song of David and a sermon of Peter affirmed the truth. Jesus was not a hoax. Christianity was not a delusion. Jehovah had stepped into history. “God has made this Jesus...both Lord and Christ,” Acts 2:36.

- **A song of David.** Like the early Christians in Jerusalem, David was in peril. He made God His hiding place, Psalms 16:1. There was no better place to be, Psalms 16:2. All the desires of his soul were satisfied in God. David delighted in the faithful. He shunned the ungodly, Psalms 16:3,4. He was secure, Psalms 16:5. Regardless of the circumstances, David would not be moved, Psalms 16:8. The Lord would not abandon him—neither in this life nor in the life to come, Psalms 16:9,10. David foresaw the resurrection. He had a glimpse of what was ahead, Psalms 16:11.

- **A sermon of Peter.** David spoke as a prophet, Acts 2:29,30. He was respected by those in Jerusalem when Peter preached. The apostle boldly affirmed the resurrection, Acts 2:31. To support his claim, Peter quoted David, Acts 2:25-28. His argument was convincing. It was Good News. What God promised He fulfilled by raising Jesus from the dead, Acts 13:32. Under pressure to stop talking about the resurrection, Peter said he could not help speaking about what he had seen and heard, Acts 4:20. The hope of the Old Testament prophet was a reality to the New Testament preacher.

   Everything should be viewed in light of the resurrection.

Whether in life or in death, we can always see the Lord before us, I Thessalonians 5:10. Jesus cheated the grim reaper. He reconciled us to God, Romans 5:11. He brought “immortality to light,” II Timothy 1:8-10. He gave us “inexpressible joy,” I Peter 1:8,9. All of this, and more, because He lives, John 14:18,19. Praise God! Jesus promised that we can live with Him—both now and throughout eternity, John 14:1-3.

   *Father, the earth is not my permanent home. The grave is not my final resting place. I see You up ahead. Soon I will see you face to face. In Him, who lives, Amen.*
“The Sovereign Lord is my strength,” Habakkuk 3:19.

Israel was in dire straits. Heaven did not seem to care, Habakkuk 1:2,3. God appeared to “tolerate wrong,” to allow evil to triumph over good, Habakkuk 1:13. Life does not make sense in times of crisis.


• A concerned prophet. Habakkuk was a patriot. He loved his country. He shuddered to think of the coming invasion, Habakkuk 1:5-11. God was ready to punish His wayward people. Because of His great mercy, it was better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of the enemy, II Samuel 24:14. Yet, it is still a “dreadful thing” to face the anger of Jehovah, Hebrews 10:31. When confronted by God, Adam was afraid, Genesis 3:10, Job was faint, Job 23:16, and John fell down “as though dead,” Revelation 1:17a. When face to face with the Almighty, sinners hide from God while saints hide in God, Psalms 143:9.

• A confident saint. Habakkuk braced himself. He was ready for God to demonstrate His power. Indeed, he invited the Lord to step forward and judge His people, Habakkuk 3:2. God must do what His justice requires. In the process, however, saints will be caught in the crossfire. But, they will rejoice in their sufferings, Romans 5:3. They know that “in all things God works for the good of those who love Him,” Romans 8:28. They will fix their eyes “not on what is seen but on what is unseen,” II Corinthians 4:18. God is faithful, Philippians 1:6. He will rescue when deliverance seems impossible.

God is our strength. Therefore, when things go haywire, we are not “anxious about anything,” Philippians 4:6. We may lose our comforts, but we will not lose our Comforter. Is that not how it should be? Since we have been raised with Christ, we set our “hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God,” Colossians 3:1.

No one is made strong until he realizes he is weak.

The Sovereign Lord is our strength, Zechariah 10:12; II Corinthians 3:5; 9:8; Ephesians 3:20,21; Colossians 1:10-12. His power is indispensible, I Peter 1:3-5. In seasons of adversity, human strength is little better than weakness. Christians wait for the Lord. He will make our feet like the feet of a deer—steady and secure, Habakkuk 3:19.

Lord, You are the secret of my strength. I walk in dangerous places. But, You are with me. Therefore, I can rejoice and be glad. In Him, who gives me the power to move on, Amen.
“I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets,” Numbers 11:29.

The Israelites complained. They were tired of the manna, Numbers 11:4-6. Their griping angered God and frustrated Moses, Numbers 11:10. Moses had not bargained for such a burden. He had had enough, Numbers 11:11-15.

The Lord appointed seventy men to help Moses lead the people, Numbers 11:16; cf. Deuteronomy 1:9-13. They shared leadership with Moses, Deuteronomy 1:15-17. Moses was relieved. The people were pleased, Deuteronomy 1:14.

God gave His Spirit to the seventy leaders, Numbers 11:17. All of them prophesied (though two of them did so elsewhere), Numbers 11:25,26. This apparently caused no small stir in the camp, Numbers 11:27.

- **Appeal of Joshua.** Moses’ long time aide suggested that Moses put an end to their prophesying, Numbers 11:28. A reason was not given. Did their prophesying threaten the authority of Moses? Was Joshua concerned that things would get out of hand? Eldad and Medad had the Spirit of God. They were simply doing what the other leaders did. Why would Joshua want to stop what God was doing? Was it a matter of a narrow mind and a small heart being fearful of new things?

- **Reply of Moses.** Moses did not seem worried. He gently asked Joshua, “Are you jealous for my sake?” If Joshua responded, his answer was not recorded. Moses wished “that all the Lord’s people were prophets,” Numbers 11:29. Where Eldad and Medad prophesied did not concern Moses. He was only anxious that they had the Spirit!

It is easy to feel threatened. This is especially true when the other group is “not one of us,” Mark 9:38-40, when it imperils the prosperity of our group, John 3:25,26, or when it does things differently, Acts 11:19,20. But, if “the hand of the Lord is with them,” if there is “evidence of the grace of God” in what they do, should they not be encouraged? Acts 11:21-23. Even when their motives are “envy and rivalry,” they should be allowed room to work, Philippians 1:15-18.

An uncommon amount of common sense is what the world calls wisdom.

Moses handled the matter skillfully. Joshua was a good friend. It is the privilege of friendship to offer counsel. It is also the right of friendship to refuse it. Moses did. When advice preserves the status of man at the expense of God, it should be laid aside. The Spirit blows wherever He pleases, John 3:8. He empowers those He determines to empower, I Corinthians 12:11. Should not we wish that all believers were anointed by God, I John 2:27.

Father, it is easy for me to get in the way, to stymie the progress of the Church. Help me be gracious when others say and do things differently. Over rule my tendency to want things done my way. Your will be done. Through Him who is on the throne, Amen.
“Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God,” 1 Peter 2:16.

It is easy to bend truth into error. For instance, grace can be twisted into an excuse for sin, Romans 6:1. Faith can be turned into an alibi for omitting deeds, James 2:14. Love for God can be made a substitute for love of people, 1 John 4:20,21. In other words, concentrating on heaven is often a justification for ignoring responsibility on earth.

There is no teaching more frequently abused than that of freedom. The Galatians were called to liberty. They appeared to use that liberty as an occasion to do as they pleased, Galatians 5:13. “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord,” Paul urged, “that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking,” Ephesians 4:17.

- **Christian freedom.** Everyone is a fallen creature in a sinful world. The condition is universal. Everyone is a sinner, Romans 3:23. The condition is absolute. Nothing good dwells in anyone, Romans 7:18. Mankind is in bondage to decay, Romans 8:21. But, by the grace of God, every believer has been set free, Romans 6:17,18. He is liberated from the domination of sin. His is free to “live a new life,” Romans 6:3,4. The clemency of God removed the shackles of death. It introduced life in the Spirit, Romans 8:9-11. It is an accomplishment of Christ clothed in the omnipotence of heaven.

- **Christian slavery.** Christian liberty is not only freedom from a sinful nature but also freedom to live in the Lord, Romans 8:12-14. The saint has chosen to be in the priesthood of God, 1 Peter 2:4,5. As part of his vestment, he wears an engraved seal: “Holy to the Lord,” Exodus 28:36. God writes His name on each believer, Revelation 3:12. The saint lives as a citizen of heaven, Philippians 3:18-20. He is fully aware of his blessed state, his belonging to God, 1 Peter 2:9,10. As an alien and stranger in this world, he abstains from “sinful desires” which war against his soul, 1 Peter 2:11.

True freedom is to walk with God and fear no evil.

Though free, the believer enslaves himself. He deliberately submits to his Master, Romans 6:16-18. His slavery is voluntary. He is emancipated to serve. His former servitude to sin was a disgrace. His present obedience to Christ is honorable, free from the corruption of the world, 1 Peter 2:16.

Sin is beneath the dignity of the believer. It corrodes the soul. It separates from God. If evil is practiced in private, it will eventually appear in public. The outward cannot be pure when the inward in polluted, 1 John 2:15,16. But, thank God, we are free, Revelation 1:5b. We are free—free—free from sin at last!

*I am truly blessed, Father. You have bought my freedom and invited me to serve. As one of Your priests, may I be holy at all times and in all places for the sake of Your honor and glory. In Jesus name, Amen.*
“Like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions,” Deuteronomy 32:11.

How does a baby eagle learn to fly? Its nest is often in a tree on the edge of a cliff, Jeremiah 49:16. If the little eagle falls from the nest, without previous flight training, death is inevitable. Therefore, until it can fly, the eaglet is completely dependent on its parents.

So it was with Israel. After she was rescued from Egypt, she was totally reliant on the Lord to supply her necessities of life, Deuteronomy 32:12-14. Yet there were occasions when Jehovah seemed to abandon Israel, Deuteronomy 31:16,17. These were times of testing, the “flight school” of heaven! It was the only way for Israel to grow up, the only way for her to learn to fly. The Lord treated her like a baby eagle.

God never asks us to surrender anything without giving us something better.

- **His aim.** Eagles want their young to become adults. In order to do so, they must fly. God wanted His people to be mature. As Isaiah said, “Those who hope in the Lord...will soar on wings like eagles,” Isaiah 40:31. The desert experience was the flight school of Israel. It was the training ground for trusting the Lord, Exodus 19:4.

- **His method.** An eagle “stirs up its nest,” Deuteronomy 32:11. The eagle does not allow its brood to live a complacent life. The adult eagle destroys the nest. The eaglet is forced to rely on its parent. The eagle leaves the decimated nest with its young perched precariously on its back. The tandem birds soar high into the heavens. Then, without warning, they turn upside down. The eaglet plunges out of control—fluttering, tumbling, and squawking—toward the valley below. Before crashing to the ground, the parent bird swoops down underneath its frantic offspring, catches it on its back, and returns to the clouds. The process is repeated over and over until the eaglet begins to fly. So Jehovah carries His people, Exodus 19:4. He rouses them to action. He places them in trying situations. By removing comforts, He goads them to do what they thought was impossible.

- **His care.** As cruel as it may look, the eagle loves its chicks. The training does not hurt the little one. God also cared for Israel, Deuteronomy 32:10; cf. Hosea 11:3,4. He spread His wings over His people, protected them as one shields his eyes from harm, Psalms 17:8,9; cf. Proverbs 7:2; Zechariah 2:8.

The Lord loves us (even though He allows us to suffer trials). He tailors our training to match our endurance, I Corinthians 10:13. These tribulations are part of the flight school of God. Are we ready for another mid air maneuver?

*You are a master teacher, Lord. You know how to help me grow. The flight school of heaven has its scary moments. But, You are there. You carry me on Your back until I learn to fly. Be patient. I am trying. In Him, who wants me to soar, Amen.*
With God we will gain the victory,” Psalms 108:13.

The psalmist was shaken. His world was turned upside down. God promised victory, Psalms 108:7-9. Yet Israel suffered defeat, Psalms 108:10,11. What had happened? How could it be explained? What should the faithful do?

In the midst of trying times, the followers of God are challenged. They must walk by faith rather than by sight, II Corinthians 5:7. They must breathe a spirit of confidence, maintain an air of victory, Psalms 9:9,10; 27:5; 37:39; 143:11.

“Faith is being certain of what we do not see,” Hebrews 11:1.

- **Trouble.** On the human level, life can be trying. The past does not always give hope. The future may appear grim. The adversary is relentless. Christians can experience serious setbacks. They may be reduced to holding their position. Reputation can be tarnished. Success may give way to failure. Believers can fall short of expectations in a spiritual struggle. They may find themselves shy of their goal, grieved by the fruitlessness of their labor. Regardless of the cause, the sting of defeat is painful. And, at such times, “the help of man is worthless,” Psalms 108:12; cf. Psalms 22:11.

- **Trust.** God is on call around the clock. In spite of whatever happens on earth, the saint can pour out his heart to heaven, Psalms 108:1. The Lord is always listening. His faithfulness is beyond measure. He is our help in time of need, Psalms 28:7; 54:4; 86:17. The righteous can expect His intervention “because they take refuge in Him,” Psalms 37:40. “With God we will gain the victory,” Psalms 108:13a.

- **Triumph.** The psalmist was sure that God would respond to his prayer, Psalms 31:22; 143:1. He was sure the Lord would step forward, rout the enemy, and secure victory. It is the task of believers to trust the Lord, to be convinced that help is on the way. The faithful are asked to wait in hope. They are asked to believe that they will be more than conquerors, that they will one day understand what sorely perplexes them now. Therefore, the faith of the psalmist was firm. He spoke with unwavering assurance. His mouth was full of praise, Psalms 108:3-5.

The Lord remains the same, Hebrews 1:12. The help of man is worthless, uncertain, and limited, Psalms 118:8. Only God can subdue the demons that war against us. Faith in Him is the victory, I John 5:4. But the saints do not wait for the enemy to surrender before they believe. They praise God when the rain comes and when it is withheld. They glorify the Lord when the enemy advances or retreats, Psalms 16:8. His people are sure, unrelenting in their devotion regardless of the circumstances, I Corinthians 15:58. They are always confident, always rejoicing, always at peace in the Lord, II Corinthians 2:14.

Lord, may my faith be as consistent as Your love. You are always there for me. I can depend on it. I want to be steady and responsible like You. In Jesus is my Lord, Amen.
“If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me,” Philippians 1:22.

Sooner or later everyone faces a life and death decision. Paul did. He was divided over what was the best use of his life. “I am between the two,” he said, “I desire to depart to be with Christ...but it is more necessary...that I remain in the body,” Philippians 1:23,24.

The apostle knew that whatever happened to him would “serve to advance the Gospel,” Philippians 1:12. While imprisoned, he shared the Good News with the guards. And his incarceration emboldened others to speak more freely of the faith, Philippians 1:13,14.

Paul was ready to go. His time of departure was close at hand. To live meant continued service in the Kingdom of God. To die meant release from his labors, Philippians 1:21. He was old. He was tired. And, whether in life or in death, he would be with the Lord, I Thessalonians 5:10.

• **The choice of life.** As long as a saint lives, he lives for others, Philippians 2:3,4. Friends need him. Family wants him. The world waits for him. His life brings joy to those in his circle of relationship. The choice of life is a choice for others, Philippians 2:17,18. Life is a blessing—a blessing to pass on to enrich fellow humans. Christians would have it no other way, II Corinthians 5:15.

• **The choice of death.** Paul was hemmed in—desiring to stay but wanting to go. In his case, to desire death was a sign of hope. He “fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith,” II Timothy 4:7. He was packed and ready to go. He longed to be with Christ. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord,” Revelation 14:13.

Christians have been crucified. They no longer live for themselves. Instead, Christ lives in them. The lives they live and the deaths they die have one, unchanging center—Jesus Christ, Galatians 2:20.

He came that we may have life—have it to the full, John 10:10.

Some people exist. Others live. There is a huge difference. All who draw breath exist. They eat and sleep. They follow their natural instincts. They have no purpose beyond themselves. They take up space. They exist. Others live to make the world a better place. They serve. They care. They long for the great beyond. Millions exist. Few live. Rare, indeed, are those who say, “If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me,” Philippians 1:22. Are we one of those faithful few?

Father, the choice is mine. I can exist or I can live. I choose life—life in Christ. Thanks for providing the alternative. Through Him, who lives in me, Amen.
September 25

“The Lord will do what is good in His sight,” I Chronicles 19:13.

The pages of scripture are full of stories about war. The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat is a common theme. Through all the dust and fury of the battlefield comes a voice that urges the troops to move forward. The text today is one of those calls to courage.


- Proper choice. In both the physical and spiritual realms, battles are won with the help of God, Psalms 118:7. Victory depends on the hand of heaven, Psalms 20:6. If He is for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:31. The battle belongs to the Lord, I Samuel 17:47. It is certain He will be with us if we trust in His name, Psalms 20:7,8.

- Brave heart. Actions come from motives. Joab motivated his soldiers with patriotism. “Fight for the people and the cities of God,” he said, I Chronicles 19:13. We must encourage each other to stand with the Lord in the battle against evil, Ephesians 6:10-13. The reason is clear. The enemy forms his battle lines. God issues His call to arms. It is time to respond, put on our armor, and join the fray.

- Wise effort. The victory of Joab was facilitated in part by a strategic plan, I Chronicles 19:10-12. He divided his troops. Each division attacked the enemy. The first to repel his adversity was to come to the aid of the other. Battles are often decided by the presence or absence of reinforcements. This is especially true in confrontations with satan. We must not fight alone. The victory goes to those who lock arms with their fellow saints and march behind their Commander in Chief, cf. II Chronicles 32:7,8.

The words of Joab echo in our ears today. “Let the Lord do what is good in His sight,” I Chronicles 19:13. This is faith at its best. It is a resolve to leave the skirmishes of life in the hands of the Almighty. It is confidence in the Sovereignty of God. It leads the soldier to battle. It moves the martyr to suffer. It inspires the believer to engage the opposition, Isaiah 50:7; cf. Psalms 22:5.

Why trust God for a future victory if we cannot trust Him for a present battle?

At the end of the day, what will our legacy be? Did we ignore His call? Did we enter the contest? Were we faithful to the end? It all depends—depends on a proper choice, a brave heart, and a wise effort. The battle belongs to the Lord. He is in control. Do we belong to the Lord? Does He have the final say in our life?

God, of this I am sure: You do what is good. I do not know the outcome. I trust Your judgment, rely on Your strength. Through my Commander-in-Chief, Amen.
September 26

“If a person sins...even though he does not know it...he is guilty,” Leviticus 5:17.

What an eye opener! The Lord issued a startling truth with enormous implications. Humans can be ignorant of their misdeeds and still be guilty of wrong. It is often assumed that sin involves an awareness of error, a consciousness of transgression at the moment of commission. Hence, people expect to be excused if they plead ignorance.


Jehovah was interested in being absolutely clear. The people ought to have known their obligations. God had spoken. Their ignorance was inexcusable. Whether they sinned intentionally or unintentionally, they needed forgiveness.

- **Intentional sin.** There were many commandments. The people were regularly given reminders, Deuteronomy 18:17-19. Still they fell into forgetfulness. They came up short in the performance of their duty. Intentional sin was considered a transgression of the covenant of the Lord. Achan was guilty, Joshua 7:15. It was also the crime of Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:3,4. “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sin is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment,” Hebrews 10:26,27. The Lord does not tolerate willful disobedience.

- **Unintentional sin.** Breaking the law is breaking the law. As it is written, “if a person sins...even though he does not know it...he is guilty,” Leviticus 5:17; cf. 4:27. Unintentional sin results in a penalty because guilt is incurred, Leviticus 5:14-16. Ignorance is not an excuse, Luke 23:34a. Is this not obvious in life? Accidental mistakes, wrong decisions, and hasty moves still cumulate in hurtful outcomes. An unintentional action can produce as much pain as an intentional one. Whether known or not known beforehand, sin is a breach of justice that must be repaired.

Sin that is categorized, graded, or classified is still sin.

A loose presentation of the Gospel can relax the obligation of obedience. It tolerates immoralities. It turns grace into a license for mischief, Romans 6:1,2a. The goodness of God does not cancel the obligation of man, Romans 6:15. By no means! The Lord requires as much obedience under the Gospel as He did under the law, Philippians 2:12,13. He wants us to know that ignorance is still sin. It leads to blunders that result in guilt. Hence, study His word, II Timothy 2:15. Know His ways, Exodus 33:13. Do His will, Psalms 40:8. Ask for forgiveness, Psalms 19:12.

*You have spoken, Father. Your will has been made known. Though I want to follow it, I may blunder in ignorance. Cleanse me of unintentional sin. In Jesus, my Savior, Amen.*
“Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession,” II Corinthians 2:14.

Paul planned to visit Corinth, II Corinthians 1:15,16. At the time, he fully intended to do what he promised. However, he changed his mind. Instead of “another painful visit” (to correct the errors in the Church), he decided to write a letter, II Corinthians 2:1.

Some people in Corinth charged him with fickleness—talking out of both sides of his mouth, II Corinthians 1:17. He sent the letter with Titus. After delivering the epistle, he asked Titus to meet him in Troas to tell him how the Corinthians received his message.

Paul experienced “distress and anguish” in composing the letter, II Corinthians 2:4. His anxiety increased when Titus did not come, II Corinthians 2:12,13. Paul had “no rest” until he met his brother in the faith, II Corinthians 7:5-7. Their reunion was a source of profound thanksgiving, II Corinthians 2:14. Paul was grateful for his life in the Lord.

- **Captive of Christ.** Like every believer, Paul was a captive of Jesus. He was paraded before the world as a trophy of the conquering power of God, I Corinthians 4:9. The apostle referred to the victory processions of the Roman army. The triumphant soldiers proudly marched as free men. The captives were tied to the chariot of the general. Paul saw himself as a captive. He was under the complete control of the One who had taken over his life, II Corinthians 4:10; Galatians 6:17. He was “the aroma of Christ.” People reacted to him differently. To some he was a harbinger of life. To others a herald of death, II Corinthians 2:15,16.

- **Messenger of God.** As a captive in the victory procession of God, Paul spread everywhere the message of redemption, II Corinthians 2:14. The Lord made His intentions known through His surrendered servant, Colossians 1:25. Paul was not fickle. He was faithful. He followed the drum beat of heaven. He was “sent from God,” II Corinthians 2:17b. He went when the Lord called. He did what the Lord commanded. His life was not his own. It belonged to God. Consequently, Paul could rightly say,


“Who is equal to such a task?” Paul inquired, II Corinthians 2:16b. No one is by himself. “Our competence comes from God,” II Corinthians 3:5. Moreover, unlike some in Corinth, who troubled the Church by demeaning the apostle, Paul did not peddle the word for profit, II Corinthians 2:17a; cf. II Corinthians 11:20,21a. He was “sincere.” He refused to cover up his blemishes. Because he belonged to Christ Jesus, he crucified his sinful nature with its passions and desires, Galatians 5:24. He became the show piece of submission. He asks us to do what he did, to follow his example, I Corinthians 11:1.

Lord, let my life be fully consecrated to You. Your victory parade is an awesome reminder of who I should be. Only Your Spirit can make me equal to the task. Fill me. Lead me. I am Yours. In Jesus name, Amen.
King Asa reigned in 900 BC. In his earlier years, he had put his trust in God, II Chronicles 14:11. He learned an invaluable lesson. “The Lord is with you when you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you, but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you,” II Chronicles 15:2. Unfortunately, a few years later, in a similar situation, Asa failed. He relied on a neighboring king, II Chronicles 16:7.

The issue boils down to putting trust where it rightfully belongs. People are prone to believe in the visible instead of the invisible. Asa knew by experience that trust in God was best, II Chronicles 15:3-6,10-15. Yet, in his sunset years, when Asa was ill, he did not seek the help of heaven, II Chronicles 16:12. What did Asa forget? What should he have remembered? “The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him,” II Chronicles 16:9.


- **Hearts of the committed.** The committed can be divided into two classes—the partially committed and the fully committed. The less devoted servants of God have fewer noble impulses and less mountain top experiences. Their spirituality is expressed in fits and spasms. The fully devoted have more sublime encounters and deeper devotional moments. Asa was committed. He “did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord,” II Chronicles 14:2. He sought the Lord with all his heart and soul, II Chronicles 15:12. But he faltered. Before he died, he abandoned his commitment. To be fully committed requires faithfulness until death, Revelation 2:10. The saints will never be perfect, but they can press on to the very end, Philippians 3:12-15a.

“Commit to the Lord whatever you do,” Proverbs 16:3.

God delivers the faithful, Psalms 9:10. He delivers them from their troubles or delivers them in their troubles. Either way He will show Himself strong to those whose hearts are fully committed to Him, II Chronicles 16:9. That is His promise to His faithful followers, Psalms 22:4,5; 33:18-22.

Lord, I want to be a finisher. I want to go the full distance, to complete the race, to remain faithful to the end. I will keep my eyes on You as You keep watch over me. I will make it because You are helping me. Thank You. In humble gratitude, I pray, Amen.
“Proclaim the message,” Jonah 3:2.

In this life, God is a God of second chances, Jonah 3:1. The Lord told Jonah to preach in Nineveh, Jonah 1:2. The prophet headed in the opposite direction, Jonah 1:3. God intervened, Jonah 1:17. Jonah repented, Jonah 2:2. He was given another opportunity, Jonah 3:2. Jonah did what the Lord asked him to do the second time around, Jonah 3:3a.

- **Changed person.** The prophet had carelessly thrown aside his opportunity. The encounter with the great fish was a wakeup call. “What I have vowed I will make good,” he said, Jonah 2:9b. Re-commissioned to a forsaken work, he marched ahead with renewed resolve, Jonah 3:4. When Jonah fled from the Lord, he lost his position as a prophet. He became fish food. Jonah could not be a deserter and a disciple, a rebel and a voice for God. He had to make a choice, cf. Joshua 24:15. He chose the Lord.

- **Same assignment.** The mutiny of the prophet did not change the purpose of God. Jonah began again exactly where he left off. He was to say what he had been ordered to say before fleeing from God. He was to preach the word, II Timothy 4:2. He was to warn Nineveh of the coming judgment. “God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believed,” I Corinthians 1:21; cf. Jonah 3:10. Hence, we are to faithfully “proclaim the message.”

- **Faithful servant.** Jonah made an about face. No more consulting the flesh. No more running away. In deep surrender, he asked, “What must I do?” As a changed man, he, in effect, said, “Here am I, send me!” When God asked him to “arise” he arose. When the Lord said “go” he went. He resumed his work with a new attitude. As a sinful man, he was forgiven. As a prodigal son, he came home. How exemplary! How encouraging! Yet, from all indications, how temporary! After obeying Jehovah, Jonah “became angry,” Jonah 4:1. He did not want the people of Nineveh to be saved, Jonah 4:2,3.

The wrath of Jonah is an all-too-common attitude in the Church. He had tasted the grace of God. He could not bear seeing it extended to others. Blinded by his own bias, he wanted to restrict the compassion of heaven to himself and to his people. The narrow mindedness of Jonah is sadly comical. It is a reflection of our own ethnic cataracts.

“Make known among the nations what (God) has done,” Psalms 105:1.

Jesus asked us to “preach the Good News to all creation,” Mark 16:15. We stay at home. We must go to every tribe, tongue, and people. We must say whatever God commands, Jeremiah 1:7. Are we a Jonah or a Jeremiah? Are we headed toward Tarshish or toward Nineveh? The voice of the Lord says, “Go and proclaim the message.”

Father, Your orders are clear. My resistance is also clear. I want Your grace but hesitate to share it. Give me another chance to be a faithful servant. In Him, Amen.
Paul did not travel like a gypsy. He moved under the guidance of God. His itinerary was handled by heaven, Acts 16:6-10. The Lord was sending him to Jerusalem. The apostle did not know all that was ahead, Acts 20:22. He did not expect to know.

Paul was aware that trouble awaited him, Romans 15:31. He knew this from past experience. And, on his way to Jerusalem, the Spirit, through the prophet Agabus, said the apostle would be arrested, Acts 21:10,11. He was headed to prison, Acts 20:23. Still Paul marched on. Why was he undaunted?

• **Bound in spirit.** Paul was already a captive of God, a prisoner in His victory procession, II Corinthians 4:10,11. Hence, he was “compelled by the Spirit,” Acts 20:22. The term means “to force,” Acts 26:11; 28:19; Galatians 2:14. In each context, the word is describing an internal influence (rather than an external force), Matthew 14:22. The motivation for the actions of Paul came from inside him.

• **Indifferent to hardship.** In light of his impending difficulties, Paul remained unmoved. He was not affected by the things that make most people wince, Philippians 3:13. This life was not his goal. Heaven was, Philippians 3:14. Thus, his earthly existence was “worth nothing” to him, Acts 20:24a. He had settled the issue of selfish indulgence. He pressed ahead. He set his heart on things above, Colossians 3:1-3.

• **Determined to finish.** The apostle was single minded. He wanted to “finish the race and complete the task,” Acts 20:24. His consuming passion was “testifying to the Gospel of God’s grace.” It was the dominating force to which everything else was secondary. It was time to move on. The voice of God beckoned. The Spirit compelled him forward. He said good bye and headed toward Jerusalem, Acts 20:36-38.

Because the Spirit had come, he was compelled to go.

The Holy Spirit gave the apostle little indication of exactly what was coming. Complete knowledge of the future is not good for us. It takes away the need to walk by faith. It stymies the exercise of moral discernment. It removes the necessity of prayer. The feeling that all is known prevents us from relying on the Lord.

We cannot be thankful enough that we are cast entirely on the goodness of providence. Do we want to walk in the dark with God or would we rather walk in the light alone? The Lord will provide. His grace is sufficient. Let us not presume to see the ways of the Spirit. We should contemplate them in the past and trust them for the future.

*Your presence within, Father, is enough. You are my compass and my destiny. I long to see You face to face. Till then, I am Your prisoner. In Him, whose love compels me, Amen.*


October 1

“Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord,” I Corinthians 15:58.

Suppose this life is all there is. Suppose death is the end. Suppose there is no after life, no immortality, no heaven, no here after, and no world to come. Suppose the dead are not raised. Then what?! What does this life become? I Corinthians 15:13-19.

Without a hope of eternity, life is a road to nowhere. It is like a puff of steam, James 4:13,14; 1 Peter 1:24,25. But believers have hope, I Corinthians 15:51,52. They view this life as the dressing room for eternity, I Corinthians 15:53.

Since death is not the end, we “stand firm,” I Corinthians 15:58a. Nothing should move us. Our mind is made up. Our loyalty is decided. We are steadfast when all goes well and unmovable when it goes otherwise, Colossians 1:22,23a.

• **Work of God.** Our existence—here and hereafter—is the work of God. He created, guided, and saved. He is still busy, John 5:17. We “meditate” on His awesome work, Psalms 64:9; 77:12. It is “beautiful.” We are unable to fully “fathom” it, Ecclesiastes 3:11. Still we stay involved in it, I Corinthians 16:10. The work of God is more than mere “Church work.” It is more than humanitarian “social service.” The work of God is pointing men and women to their eternal home—the “new heaven and new earth.” There we will be with God forever, Revelation 21:1-4.

• **Labor of man.** The Father remains busy. His children should be “fully” engaged in His work, I Corinthians 15:58. Christians are prone to focus on themselves. But spiritual selfishness is an inadequate preparation for the journey ahead. The Church is full of religious “pew potatoes”—people who attend worship but remain idle. Paul encouraged us to “always” give ourselves “fully” to the work of the Lord.

“Be ready to do whatever is good,” Titus 3:1.

Death is a joyful event for the saints. It is the doorway to the life beyond, a victory celebration that ushers the believer to the pearly gates, I Corinthians 15:56,57. There is no need to fear it, to shrink back from it. We only see the dark side of death—the tears of grief, the sense of loss. We see the perishable and dishonorable, I Corinthians 15:42,43. Only beyond the grave will we see the glorious and incorruptible, I Corinthians 15:44; 1 John 3:2.

When we look back on death, we will appreciate its blessing. “Death will be swallowed up in victory,” I Corinthians 15:54. We will be freed from the restraints of our physical environment. “Therefore...always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain,” I Corinthians 15:58.

*Thanks for a glimpse of what is ahead. Your work, Lord, is my reason to live. Your home is my future address. Death is the bridge between them. I long for the victory. In the name of Jesus, my Resurrection and my Hope, Amen.*
October 2

"I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord," Genesis 18:27.

Sodom and Gomorrah were a cesspool of sin. God was about to take action, Genesis 18:20,21. Abraham intervened, Genesis 18:23. He pled for the safety of those who lived there, Genesis 18:24. Abraham spoke plainly. It was no time for clichés.

The patriarch was appalled by the impending disaster. The demise of sinners became his concern, Genesis 18:27-32. Most people would leave the wicked to their deserved destiny. Abraham took up their cause. He bargained for their deliverance.

What does this story say about intercessory prayer? What does it indicate about an omniscient, sovereign God who listens to the petitions of the faithful?

"The Lord is nigh to all who call upon Him," Psalms 145:18.


- **Logic used.** Abraham appealed to the justice of heaven, Genesis 18:25. He believed there was a moral goodness in God. He assumed the Lord would show restraint in punishing the wicked. Had not He already done so in sparing the Amorites? Genesis 15:16. The patriarch started with a high number to insure a favorable response. He gradually diminished it as grace increased. He haggled like a market vender.

- **Success achieved.** Abraham did not ask for an unconditional sparing of Sodom. Abraham dickered as far as he dared. He ceased before the Lord stopped. God agreed to every one of his requests. It is rash to speculate what would have happened if he had continued. Abraham sensed he had reached the limit of leaning on the kindness of God. His persistence was rewarded, cf. Luke 11:5-10.

Abraham was bold to speak because he was moved by the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. These twin cities represented the ancient world. They were the unredeemed masses of humankind. The justice of God demanded the punishment of sin. God was letting Abraham know that the patriarch had a role in saving the world, Genesis 18:18,19.

The negotiations of Abraham rested on the reality of the goodness and severity of heaven. We, likewise, believe in both. The Gospel and the judgment come from the same God. They are the bedrock of our faith, Romans 11:22. Let us, then, speak boldly.

*Lord, I come before Your throne in humble boldness. I plead for the wicked while I persist in trying to reach them. May Your will be done, Amen.*
“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us,” Deuteronomy 29:29.

When will the end come? Israel did not know, cf. Acts 1:7. She was not to pry into things purposely kept secret, Deuteronomy 18:10,11.

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!” Romans 11:33.

Secrets are the domain of God, Psalms 139:1-6; I John 3:20b. Obedience is the place of man, Deuteronomy 29:29.

• Secret things. The secret things are the things which God has not revealed about the future. Regardless what the Lord says, humans always want to know more, Daniel 12:8; John 21:21. Most secrets will remain hidden until eternity. We ponder the origin of evil, the suffering of the innocent, and the free will of man in light of the foreknowledge of God. We are baffled by the doctrine of incarnation and the process of inspiration. We struggle to grasp the trinity. Why is so much left unclear? Perhaps, if it was revealed, we would not understand anyway! The existence of unsolved mysteries is a test of faith, John 20:29. It is a stimulus to learning, Ephesians 1:17; Colossians 2:2,3. Still, when all is said and done, we will only “know in part,” I Corinthians 13:9,10. Our responsibility is to accept the light we have in spite of the darkness that remains.

• Revealed things. Divine revelation is not intended to satisfy intellectual curiosity. It is a guide for practical obedience, II Timothy 3:16,17. As long as revelation remains external to us, it is not ours. To possess it, it must fill our minds, move our emotions, and shape our desires. Then it will “belong” to us and we can hand it down to our children (not simply on the printed page but as a living faith), Ephesians 6:4. The revealed things are made known to those who fear Him, Psalms 25:14. Honest obedience brings greater understanding, Hosea 6:3. The Lord will make known what is needed to follow Him. Of course, He will still have His secrets. But His commands are sufficiently plain to obey, Psalms 119:105. The future may be hidden but our next step is adequately illuminated. The scripture does not direct our attention toward the surprises of tomorrow. It is written to focus our thoughts on the responsibilities of today, II Corinthians 6:1,2.

The finite cannot comprehend the infinite. We “know in part.” Yet, thank God, we know. We know enough. To doubt, because we do not understand everything is to miss the point. Let us not venture beyond our assigned limits, Isaiah 40:13,14. The secrets belong to God. What is revealed is ours. The gap between them is space left for us to meditate on His greatness, Psalms 119:27. Is that not how it ought to be?

Father, I long for the day when my questions are answered. Till then I will stick to what I know. I am grateful for Your word. Help me obey it. Through Him, Amen.
October 4

“Fight the good fight,” I Timothy 1:18.

Christian living is a daily battle. It is a war against evil. Paul encourages Timothy to persevere. The apostle reminds him to make a valiant effort, I Timothy 6:12.

Every believer needs encouragement. Fatigue, faintheartedness, and disappointment dog the most devoted saint. There is something in the faithful that rises to the challenge to fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith, II Timothy 4:7.

Toil on, faint not, pray and persevere to the end.

• **Real battle.** Christians must expend considerable energy to hold on to their beliefs, I Timothy 1:18. In baptism they affirm that “Jesus is Lord.” But many turn away. They relapse into unsavory practices. They “shipwreck” their faith, I Timothy 1:19. In order to survive, we must do battle. Slackers become casualties. The list of reasons for failure to keep a good conscience is long: influence of secular society, absence of personal conviction, lack of spiritual growth, and failure to assemble with the saints. The gladiator had to fight or die. The believer must wage war or perish, Isaiah 60:12.

• **Good fight.** Christianity is a noble cause. Wearing the crown is worth carrying the cross, Luke 14:27. It is a good fight because it upholds truth. It is a worthy warfare because the Commander is “perfect,” Hebrews 2:10. It is a great endeavor because the reward surpasses the pain endured to win, II Timothy 4:8. The term “good” denotes that which is fine, attractive, and splendid. The soldier of Christ is not a reluctant draftee, a grimacing recruit. He is a willing volunteer, a happy warrior, James 5:11.


The prize is secured by those who complete the race and keep the faith. Christianity is not a quick sprint but a long marathon. It is easy to start. It is difficult to finish, Matthew 13:18,20,21. There is great satisfaction in enduring to the end. How sad to quit, to ruin a noble effort along the way, Matthew 22:14.

Paul “kept the faith.” As a phrase common in business, it signified that he “kept the conditions of the contract.” He remained true to his commitment. He did not let the Master down. He served with valor. He refused to surrender. Through thick and thin, he stayed the course, endured the hardship, and gained the prize, Revelation 3:21.

*As Lord over the armies of heaven, You know how to lead the troops. Your battle plan will succeed. Count me in. Give me my orders. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.*
“May the Lord be with us...may He never forsake us,” I Kings 8:57.

It is a scary thing to launch out on our own. Whether going to college, getting married, starting a job, or beginning a business, new ventures are moments of testing. Will we succeed? Do we have what it takes? The answers wait till later. The trials begin now.

The history of Israel repeatedly reverberated with these times of truth. And, whenever that happened, God reminded them of His solemn pledge: “I am with you and will watch over you,” Genesis 28:15. He promised never to “leave” them or “forsake” them, Deuteronomy 4:31; 31:6,8,23; Joshua 1:5.

The children of God need to hear these bracing words. We are acutely aware of our weaknesses. We have no allusions about the task ahead, no inflated estimate of our ability to accomplish it. Troubles come and go. The Lord remains. As He was with our forefathers, so He will be with us, I Kings 8:57; cf. Matthew 28:20.

- **Promise of God.** The assurance of heaven was clear. The Lord vowed to be present with His people. He would not depart from them nor abandon them. God led Israel with the “cords of human kindness,” Hosea 11:4. He wrapped them in His everlasting arms, Deuteronomy 33:26-29. The Lord knew those who were His, Numbers 16:4,5. His angels protected them, Psalms 91:9-16. His eyes beheld their every move, Job 34:21,22; Psalms 34:15.

  God is our faithful guide. Our needs He will provide. He never will forsake. Ample provisions always make.

- **Preparation of man.** An appropriate human response to His promise is required. He is with us. Are we with Him? Heaven asked us to be strong and courageous, Joshua 1:9. There are countless exhortations in scripture to “fear not,” Genesis 26:24; 46:3; 50:19; Exodus 14:13; Deuteronomy 1:21; 20:3,4; Joshua 10:24,25. Over and over the same refrain is repeated. They are not merely comforting words and calming promises. They are calls to action. They beckon the people of faith to stand firm, hold their ground, and follow the Lord. Fear is the mother of disobedience—whether fear of shame, fear of harm, or fear of defeat, Matthew 25:24,25; Luke 8:37. Fear exaggerates difficulty. It complains of hardship. It chaffs at duty.

If we intend to seek God, then seek Him with hope. Seek Him with all our heart, expecting to find Him, Acts 17:26,27. If distressed with doubts, face them bravely. When God leads the way, fear is superfluous, Romans 8:31,32. The righteous put their hope in His faithful word, Psalms 119:81,116,147.

Father, I can count on You because You always keep Your promises. Though life may be bleak, my future shrouded in darkness, I will trust. Thank you, in Jesus, my Lord, Amen.
October 6

“My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice,” Ezekiel 33:31.

God warned the prophet. Israel was “not willing to listen,” Ezekiel 3:7. They regularly came to hear him speak, Ezekiel 14:1; 20:1. The people thought he was entertaining, Ezekiel 20:49. They loved to listen but failed to practice what he said.

• The prophet spoke. Ezekiel was the talk of the town, Ezekiel 33:30. He had a message from the Lord. Through him, Jehovah made His will known, Ezekiel 2:3,4. Ezekiel was entrusted with heavenly wisdom for the well being of Israel, Ezekiel 3:10,11. His words carried the signature of God (though they ran counter to the expectations of the people). Israel regularly sat before the prophet. They thought he sang sweet lullabies and played pretty songs, Ezekiel 33:32. Likely, when he finished, they said they “enjoyed” his message. They missed the point. They came for the wrong reason. They had no desire to do the will of God, Ezekiel 33:31a; cf. II Timothy 4:3,4.

• The people listened. There is a desire to know the unknown. It is especially true in times of adversity. Israel was in exile. They were curious about their future. A message from God was always welcome—in proportion to its agreement with human inclinations. Ezekiel had bad news, Ezekiel 5:8-11. The prophet received public ridicule. Shallow hearers discussed the messenger rather than the message. They engaged in street gossip instead of soul searching. They heard the words “but did not put them into practice,” Ezekiel 33:32b.

• The message rejected. It is easy to hear. It is difficult to obey. The one is informative. The other is work. Both are necessary to satisfy the demands of heaven, Matthew 7:24-27; James 1:22-25. Those who rely on exciting sermons for spiritual growth are leaning on a bruised reed. They are building on shifting sand. Their piety will be too shallow to endure the deep waters of trouble, James 4:17. On the judgment day, there will be little comfort in remembering what should have been done, Matthew 25:26,27.

“The Lord sent prophets to the people (but) they would not listen,” II Chronicles 24:19.

If we ignore His word, we will eventually regret it, Ezekiel 33:33. There is little value admitting the messenger spoke the truth—when the truth is neglected. Blessings once available will be out of reach. Opportunities will cease. Time will end. Excuses will not forestall catastrophe, II Peter 2:3b. We may think the messenger needlessly sought to alarm us. Before the throne, we will wish we had taken him seriously. By then, however, it will be too little too late.

Sovereign God, You have spoken. It is urgent that I listen, that I put Your words into practice. I take You seriously. I know the judgment is coming. I fully recognize the folly of postponing my obedience. Through Jesus’ holy and powerful name, Amen.
October 7

“These women were helping support them out of their own means,” Luke 8:3.

Christianity is deeply indebted to women (as women are deeply indebted to Christianity). They contributed heavily to Jesus’ ministry. They were formative in the history of the early Church. To overlook their role is to disregard a major element in the inspired story.

• **Debt of Christianity to women.** The Son of God and Redeemer of man was “born of a woman,” Galatians 4:4. He owed His childhood care and training to the tender vigilance of His mother, Luke 2:41-51. During His ministry, He often received financial support from female converts, Luke 8:3; cf. Matthew 27:55,56. Women were quiet comforters at the cross, John 19:25. They were the last witnesses of His burial, Luke 23:55, and the first witnesses of His resurrection, Luke 24:1. They were present in the upper room after the ascension, Acts 1:12-14. Their contributions to the growth of the early Church were legendary. Lydia was the first convert in Europe, Acts 16:13-15. Phoebe was a deaconess of the Church in Cenchrea, Romans 16:1. The apostle Paul mentioned numerous spiritual sisters in whose homes the Church met—who worked very hard and risked their lives for the cause of Christ, Romans 16:3,6,12,15. The same story reoccurs in every century throughout the ages. Women were truly heroines of the faith.

• **Debt of women to Christianity.** In most religions, her status is inferior to man. She often cannot vote or own property. She is frequently prohibited to attend school, work outside the home, or drive a car. She is forbidden to show her face in public. Her gender is regarded as a punishment for past indiscretions. Though her position was substantially better in the Jewish religion, inequality still remained. The birth of a daughter made her mother unclean longer than the birth of a son, Leviticus 12:1-5. She could be sold by her father to satisfy a debt, Exodus 21:7; cf. Nehemiah 5:5. A man could divorce his wife but a wife could not divorce her husband. However, all of this changed in Christianity. Now she is admitted to the Kingdom of God on the same terms as a man. In Christ, there is neither "male nor female," Galatians 3:28. The Lord accepted the compassionate ministry of women: washing His feet, preparing Him meals, financing His work, and hosting His Church. As fellow believers, men and women "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ," Ephesians 5:21. Christianity has given her a place of dignity, acceptance, and respect.

“Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise,” Proverbs 31:31.

Women stand shoulder to shoulder with men at the foot of the cross and in the trenches of the kingdom. They are fellow citizens, fellow disciples, fellow heirs, fellow helpers, fellow prisoners, and fellow martyrs. Women are partners with men, yokefellows in the faith, whether seen or unseen, whether in the forefront or the background. Is that not what God made her to be from the beginning? Genesis 2:20b-23.

*Lord, in Your infinite wisdom, You made us male and female. Appreciation for each other is the backbone of that design. Out of reverence for Christ, I intend to remain untainted by the prejudices of society. In His holy name, I pray, Amen.*
October 8

“This is how you are to bless,” Numbers 6:23.

The best known, most loved, but, perhaps, least understood benediction in scripture was given to Israel, Numbers 6:24-26. Its beauty and power is cherished worldwide. It is used at baptisms and ordinations. It is quoted and sung during dismissals and farewells.

Only fifteen words in Hebrew, it is saturated with meaning. Faith and trust in God seep through every line. It is the foundation of assurance, the reason for hope. In a world that promotes little optimism, it is the hitching post of believers. Surely the Lord will bless the righteous, Psalms 5:12; 115:12,13; 134:3.

- **Protection.** The blessing of the Lord is His favorable disposition toward human beings. It is the goodness of God in action, His grace for our protection. We can rely on Him for our complete security—body, soul, and spirit, I Thessalonians 5:23,24; cf. Psalms 91:11. The Lord will bring us safely to His heavenly kingdom, II Timothy 4:18; Jude 24,25.

- **Pardon.** The “face” of God discloses His feelings: whether favorable, Psalms 119:135; Daniel 9:17, or unfavorable, Exodus 14:24; Leviticus 17:10; Psalms 34:16; Ezekiel 39:23. His smiling face is the assurance that we will receive pardon, Psalms 80:3. Every child learns to read the look on the face of his parents. Every saint learns to interpret the countenance of God. We beg to see His face in order to know our state and standing with the Almighty, Psalms 143:7.

- **Peace.** The smiling face of Jehovah is a welcome sign of relief. The Lord approves. Heaven cares. All is well. In spite of earthly troubles, God stands ready to help, Psalms 4:6-8. The peace of God defies all understanding, Philippians 4:6,7. It is a gift from God, John 14:27, a fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22.

“The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; The Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace,” Numbers 6:24-26.

The priests were to bless the people, Deuteronomy 21:5. It was a sacred moment to feel his hand and hear his voice. Three times the name of the Lord was invoked, cf. Exodus 33:19a; 34:5-7a. Three times it was “put on the Israelites,” Numbers 6:27. We are protected by the power of that name, John 17:11.

This blessing has sanctified life throughout the ages. His protection, pardon, and peace give hope in a hopeless world. It is the inheritance of believers. Our benedictions are wishes. His benedictions are unchanging promises, Numbers 23:19,20.

Merciful Father, Your threefold doxology rests upon me every hour of every day. It is the anchor of my life, the security in my journey. Thank You for Your blessing. In Him, Amen.
October 9

“The Lord tests the heart,” Proverbs 17:3.

The eyes of God see everything, Proverbs 15:3. They see beyond the dark curtain of death, Job 26:6; Proverbs 15:11. Nothing is too trivial, too obscure, or too small, Hebrews 4:13. God is especially keen on examining the human heart, I Samuel 16:7; Proverbs 21:2.

The “heart” is the inner aspirations, secret desires, and hidden motives. It is the root of human action. God knows what makes us tick, Proverbs 20:27. He tests the hearts of men, Proverbs 24:12. The Lord determines our authenticity by stripping away the pretensions, appearances, and professions, Proverbs 16:2.

God tested Abraham, Genesis 22:1, and Hezekiah, II Chronicles 32:31. He tested them “to know what is in their hearts.” His testing was more than exposing their inner self. Like the refiner tests gold and silver, the purifying of God is an attempt to make people better, Psalms 139:23,24; Malachi 3:2,3.

• The tests. In His gracious providence, Jehovah walks us through the flames of testing. These times of trial come in many forms and in unexpected ways. They grab our attention. They cause extreme stress. The tests of God push us to our limits. They expose who we really are. Embarrassment, disappointment, and bereavement head the list. The tests are couched in change—sudden or gradual, temporary or permanent—that alter life. These trials throw the future into uncertainty. Former pleasures are beyond reach. Activities once taken for granted become impossible. The test is accepting, adjusting, and moving on without knowing if or when deliverance will come.

• The results. The trials of God are the proving ground of men. They show the Creator what manner of people we are. They reveal whether we care more for ourselves than for the Lord, Job 1:9-11. The trials of heaven measure the depth of our faith, the height of our commitment, Proverbs 24:10. They show the source of our strength in times of need, Deuteronomy 8:2-5. The tests of the Almighty demonstrate the reality or poverty of our spiritual resources, Jeremiah 17:9,10.

“I have tested you in the furnace of affliction,” Isaiah 48:10,11.

Many lessons are learned in affliction, lessons that might not be learned otherwise. For example, life is temporary, the bridge to eternity. This truth is etched in our souls by the refining fires of God. Are we ready for the judgment day? Proverbs 20:9. We endure the trials so that our faith “may be proved genuine,” I Peter 1:6,7.

Lord of mercies, God of trials, cleanse my heart. Make me whole, suitable for Your use, ready for eternity. You know best. Do what needs to be done. In Your Son, who was also tempted and tried, Amen.
October 10

“I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” II Samuel 24:24.

King David wanted to worship God, II Samuel 24:18. Araunah was willing to give him whatever he needed, II Samuel 24:22,23. David insisted on paying, II Samuel 24:24. He felt it was unbecoming to offer cheap piety.

The words “cost me nothing” usually refer to money, Genesis 29:15; Exodus 21:2; Numbers 11:5; Isaiah 52:3. But acceptable worship goes beyond finances. It includes expenditure of thought, feeling, time, and energy. God expects us to offer more than our pocketbook. He wants us to sacrifice ourselves, Romans 12:1.

We despise God when we offer cheap worship, Malachi 1:6-8. David refused to do so. We should do the same. Even when correct in creed, pure in doctrine, and professional in praise, worship can fail to be appropriate. It must honor the Lord. We are required to make “sacrifices acceptable to God,” I Peter 2:4,5.

• Reverence for God. Can we really serve the Lord with what costs us nothing? Can we honor Him with our leftovers, our scraps? Surely that is not sacrifice. It is insult! Malachi 1:14. Giving gifts is a basic principle of worship. “No one is to appear before Me empty handed,” God said, Exodus 34:20. The Israelites were to bring the best of their flocks and herds, Leviticus 22:21. The worth of an offering was determined by the level of self denial, Mark 8:34; cf. Mark 10:21-27. That which cost nothing is worth nothing. Genuine worship lays claim to all we have, Luke 21:1-4.

• Example of others. It is amazing to see what people in other religions give to their gods. These blind, deaf, and dumb idols are flooded with gifts the givers can ill afford. Generosity of such magnitude embarrasses our meager donations. Likewise, in times of persecution—both past and present—the followers of Christ have paid the price, Acts 5:41; Philippians 2:17; Colossians 1:24; Hebrews 10:32-34; Revelation 2:3. They placed their liberty and livelihood, their life and limb on the altar. Jesus gave His all, II Corinthians 8:9; Titus 2:11-14. We owe Him everything.

What we give only returns to Him what is His, I Chronicles 29:14.

What we have belongs to Him. Even generating wealth is a gift from heaven, Deuteronomy 8:17,18. If we assume we give out of our personal resources, our giving suffers. We become “bargain basement” believers preferring a “sale price” religion. Acceptable sacrifices begin with a spirit of humility. They issue from “a broken and contrite heart,” Psalms 51:17. Acceptable sacrifices are the expression of a willing mind, an appreciative attitude, and a giving hand, Hebrews 13:16.

Lord, what I count as mine is really Yours. My redemption cost me nothing but requires everything. Let me not forget. In Jesus, who became poor so that I may be rich, Amen.
The situation was desperate. Assyria had invaded Aram (also known as Syria). As a result, Aram and Israel were pressuring Judah to join them in an alliance against the invaders, II Kings 16:5.

God sent Isaiah to reassure Ahaz (king of Judah), Isaiah 7:3,4. Aram and Israel were “smoldering stubs of firewood.” Their threat was a sham. “It will not take place, it will not happen,” the Lord said, Isaiah 7:7. The king of Judah need not be concerned.

Ahaz did not listen. He took things into his own hands. He paid a handsome price to get Assyria to attack Aram, II Kings 16:8,9. His actions could hardly have been more foolish.

**Folly of trusting man.** Isaiah told King Ahaz to trust in God. “If you do not stand firm in your faith,” the prophet said, “you will not stand at all,” Isaiah 7:9. “The foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength,” I Corinthians 1:25. In vain do “the kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord,” Psalms 2:2. Unfortunately, the appeal of Isaiah fell on deaf ears. Ahaz was beside himself, petrified by fear. The assurance of the prophet seemed unrealistic. Ahaz saw the danger. Isaiah saw the Lord!

**Wisdom of trusting God.** The choice was clear: rely on man or depend on God. Isaiah had spoken. “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength,” Isaiah 30:15. Ahaz did not need to be afraid. Instead, he should stand firm and see the deliverance of God, Exodus 14:13. Ahaz was foolish. He submitted to the king of Assyria, II Kings 16:7. His tactic had short term success. Aram and Israel were defeated. In the long run, however, it was a colossal failure. Judah was attacked. Prisoners were taken. Villages were occupied. “The Lord humbled Judah because of Ahaz.” He had promoted wickedness and was unfaithful, II Chronicles 28:16-19. Ahaz made a very bad choice, II Chronicles 28:20,21.

Faith is an anchor cast into an ocean of mercy to keep us from sinking into the depths of despair.

The advice of Isaiah is not without its difficulties. What is the relationship between trusting God and protecting oneself? Does faith cancel action? Unless the Lord says otherwise, there is always something we should do. Faith in the power of God may not alter the circumstances. But it enables a person to endure. It gives confidence that God has the last word: “Be careful, be calm, and do not be afraid,” Isaiah 7:4.

*Lord, I will march on through thick and thin with You.*
*Your way is best. I shall believe when I cannot see, hope when things seem hopeless. For You are always present.*
*Through Jesus Christ, who is watching over me, Amen.*
The central symbol of faith in Christ is the cross. The primary implication of the cross is affliction. It was predicted that the Messiah would be “a man of sorrows” who was “familiar with suffering,” Isaiah 53:3. And, to His disciples, Jesus said, “If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also,” John 15:20.

His words were profoundly accurate. From the beginning, His followers were threatened, arrested, flogged, imprisoned, and murdered, Acts 4:21; 5:18,40; 7:54-60. Suffering for Christ was a badge of honor, Acts 5:41. It is the calling of every believer, 1 Peter 2:21.

- **Cause of persecution.** Regardless of when or where it occurs, the underlying cause of persecution is quite similar. (1) Those in power are threatened by the popularity of a new religious movement, Acts 4:17; cf. John 12:19; Acts 19:23-27. Their position is challenged. Their control is undermined. Suffering is inflicted to induce apostasy by intimidation. Charges are often fabricated to justify the ill treatment, Acts 21:26-29. (2) Persecution is fed by a guilty conscience, Matthew 23:33-36. The Jews knew that Jesus was innocent. He lived a blameless life. His acts of kindness were well known. Yet, they demanded His death, Acts 2:22-24,32,37. They longed for peace of mind. They sought a solution in silencing the voice of truth, Acts 4:16,17; 5:28.

“Everyone who wants to live a godly life...will be persecuted.” II Timothy 3:12.

- **Fruit of persecution.** Suffering is a weapon of satan to stymie the faith. He is frustrated. His success is limited. His schemes back fire. The saints were forewarned, Matthew 5:11,12. They stepped forward with uncommon courage. They advanced with firm resolve. The fruit of persecution became all too obvious. (1) It stimulated evangelism, Acts 8:1b,4. Thrust out, the believers spoke out. The first missionaries were refugees. The persecution that drove them abroad lasted a few days. Their evangelistic activity continued for the rest of their lives. The saints were encouraged. Their numbers increased, Acts 9:31. (2) Persecution deepened commitment. The fire of faith burned brightest in the dark hours of tribulation. The hope of glory grew when earthly comforts were removed, Romans 8:32. Christianity was understood best when the faithful were pressed to respond. Persecution perfected the saints, Hebrews 2:10.


*Lord, the honor of dishonor is my reward. Suffering is a blessing. Tribulation is a favor. I accept what is inevitable. Thanks for the warning. Through Jesus Christ, my shield and safety, Amen.*
“The man who fears God will avoid all extremes,” Ecclesiastes 7:18.

Why do the righteous suffer? Why do the wicked prosper? If God is in control, why is the world so unfair? Psalms 73:1-11. The problem defies simple solutions. The more it is pondered the less it is understood.

Caution is required. Human nature is prone to irrational excess. For example, if righteousness is good, then, it could be reasoned, being a Pharisee is better! If wickedness is good, then, a prodigal lifestyle is better! Impulsive conclusions become extravagant reactions. Sober reason is abandoned. Hurtful behavior takes over. Unbridled fanaticism leads to violence. And extreme behavior in most cases is regretted.

Certainly life is puzzling, Psalms 73:16. It is filled with inequities. Fretting about such disparities is unless, Psalms 37:1,7-9. It is a sign of impatience, a lack of trust in the fairness of God, Deuteronomy 32:4; Job 34:10; Psalms 11:7. What should a person do?

- **Avoid extremes.** We have all observed injustice: the righteous perish and the wicked prosper, Ecclesiastes 7:15. We must avoid hasty conclusions, unwise positions, and superficial judgments. Our observations are limited. The simpleton would say: “Abandon righteousness and embrace wickedness,” cf. Psalms 73:12,13. That is shallow thinking, Ecclesiastes 7:16,17. The wise will search for the mean between the extremes.

- **Exercise moderation.** There are dangers in going overboard. The over righteous are “confident of their own righteousness and look down on everybody else,” Luke 18:9. The over wicked are “brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed,” II Peter 2:12. We are advised to pursue the middle ground between excessive goodness and exorbitant badness, Ecclesiastes 7:18.

The dilemma remains. The righteous still appear to get a raw deal. Unfortunately, that is the way of the world. In this life, righteousness and wickedness guarantee nothing. Hence, we must not go too far in either direction.

Folly is found in extreme. Virtue lies somewhere in between.

The irony dissolves when we stand in the presence of God, Psalms 73:16,17. Before His throne, we get a clearer view of things, Proverbs 10:24,25. Sin is offensive to the Lord. It condemns the soul, Psalms 55:23. The temporary “benefits” of evil are not worth the eternal consequences, Psalms 73:27. Righteousness, on the other hand, is priceless. It makes life noble. It has a pleasant future, Psalms 1:6; Matthew 16:25; John 11:25.

*Righteous Father, this life is full of puzzling extremes. They have a way of crowding You out. The middle ground allows room for You to dwell within me. Please, Jesus, take up residence in my soul,* Amen.
October 14

“Please send someone else,” Exodus 4:13.

God asked Moses to return to Egypt, to lead His people to freedom, Exodus 3:7-10. The Lord promised to be with him, Exodus 3:12. The journey would not be in vain. Success was guaranteed, Exodus 3:16,17.

Moses was reluctant. He saw the obstacles. He shunned the opportunities. At first, he blamed the people. “What if they do not listen?” Exodus 4:1. Then he demeaned himself. “I am slow of speech,” he said, Exodus 4:10.

We are blinded to things as they are because we see things as we are.


- **Feeling of inadequacy.** Why did Moses hold back from serving the Lord? Was he unsure of his commission? Did he question his ability? Either would stymie his resolve. Humility without faith is timid. Yet, to know the feebleness of our abilities, while estimating the greatness of an enterprise, is imperative. In the work of God, the feeling of inadequacy can be a stepping stone toward usefulness, Jeremiah 1:6-8.

- **Voicing of excuses.** Moses knew his shortcomings. “I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since You have spoken to Your servant,” he said, Exodus 4:10. How could he persuade the ruler of Egypt to change his policy toward Israel? How could he persuade the slaves of Israel that he was sent to emancipate them? He had miscalculated in the past, Acts 7:25. Why should he assume any differently now? His excuses appeared to have merit!

- **Submitting to God.** God was unmoved, Exodus 4:11,12. He “chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong,” 1 Corinthians 1:27. His grace is sufficient. His power is made perfect in weakness, 2 Corinthians 12:9. He does His best work when we are unable to do anything. Moses submitted. Without fully knowing the future, he went back to Egypt to do what was impossible for him (on his own) to accomplish, Matthew 19:26.

It is good for believers not to regard themselves too highly, Romans 12:3. Yet, at the same time, they should not put on a false humility. It is wrong to under value our worth in the kingdom. We must be “clear minded,” 1 Peter 4:7. We should recognize the gifts the Lord has given us. A child of God should not be ashamed, Philippians 1:20. All of us are qualified to serve in some capacity. Our task is to accept His empowerment. Then we will not ask Him to send someone else.

Father, my resources are few. My talents are small. I can do little on my own. I offer my “loaves and fishes” trusting You to make them sufficient for Your purpose. Thank You. Because of Him, Amen.
“Praise the Lord,” Psalms 113:1.

A third of all references to praising God are found in the Psalms. Most of them are imperative summons to worship Him, Psalms 150:6. The entire creation—both celestial, Psalms 148:1-6, and terrestrial, Psalms 148:7-13—are called to exalt His holy name.

- **Object of praise.** The saints praise the Lord, Deuteronomy 10:21. Because He is God, He deserves every ounce (and more) of our acclaim. “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name be the glory,” Psalms 115:1. We praise Him because of His “love and faithfulness.” He is our strength, our rock, our fortress, and our deliverer, Psalms 18:1-3. No wonder we affirm His great name.

- **People of praise.** The “servants of the Lord” are commanded to celebrate His name, Psalms 113:1. These servants are referred to as “the redeemed,” Psalms 107:1-3, “the righteous,” Psalms 140:13, and “the saints,” Psalms 145:10. They see Him as the source of all goodness. They are awed by His unfailing love. The servants of the Lord recognize His providence in everything, Psalms 145:3-7.

- **Occasion of praise.** The Lord be praised “both now and forevermore,” Psalms 113:2. Praise is a holy joy in God. It dwells in us while we go about our everyday, commonplace activities. It seizes each opportunity to extol His sovereign majesty. It is cherished always. It is expressed often. Our praise is ceaseless thanks, an unending gratitude for the Father in heaven, Psalms 104:33.

- **Place of praise.** We applaud everywhere the grandeur of God, Psalms 113:3. From sea to sea, from pole to pole, wherever humans are found, God should be praised, Psalms 117:1,2. He holds the whole world in His hands. He blesses every one. He satisfies the desires of all living things, Psalms 145:13-16. “How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise Him,” Psalms 147:1.

- **Reason for praise.** God resides above but stoops down to care for His world below, Psalms 113:4-6. He is not a remote, detached, unconcerned deity, II Chronicles 16:9. He gets His hands dirty. Jehovah not only acts but He also interacts. He laughs with those who laugh, cries with those who cry, Psalms 113:7-9.

There are times for quiet mediation, for prayer and confession. Weary of speech, believers often retreat into calm solitude. Yet no worship will correspond to the biblical tradition unless it gives adequate space to jubilant praise. This is our heritage. It is our privilege, our joy, our faith, Psalms 71:14.

I praise You, O God, for who You are, for what You do. I praise You with all the fiber in my being—all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. I will praise You as long as I live. And, then, in eternity, I will praise You forever and ever. In the great name of Jesus, my Lord, Amen.
“(You) have carried out the mission,” Joshua 22:3.

During the conquest of the Promised Land, the territory east of the Jordan River was occupied first, Deuteronomy 3:12,13a. However, there was a stipulation. Those who received the land east of the Jordan must help their brothers conquer the land west of the Jordan, Deuteronomy 3:18-20.

The promise was kept. Though they had the least to gain (since they had already been given their allotted portion), they faithfully fulfilled their obligation. Joshua commended their loyalty and devotion, Joshua 22:1-3. They had served to the end—never shirking, never deserting their responsibility.

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much,” Luke 16:10.

- **The reward.** For their unwavering dedication, Joshua mentioned the rewards that awaited them. (1) Material blessing. The faithful warriors received a handsome share of the booty of battle, Joshua 22:4,6-8. The children of God cannot always count on material rewards. Yet, as a general rule, loyal service is a prerequisite of prosperity, Psalms 19:11; Proverbs 25:21,22; Jeremiah 17:10. Those who fear God and keep His commandments are always blessed in the end, Hebrews 6:10; Revelation 22:12. (2) Spiritual blessing. The greatest reward was the approval of God, Joshua 22:2. The Lord was pleased. He gave a “thumbs up” to their efforts. There is no greater joy than to hear the thunderous applause of heaven. “Well done, good and faithful servant!” Matthew 25:21. The acclaim of God is sweeter than the accolades of men.

- **The danger.** The war was over. The battle was about to begin. Those settling east of the Jordan were separating themselves from their brothers west of the river. Their fidelity to God was in jeopardy, Joshua 22:5. Pagan tribes lived in the Trans Jordan. When living among heathens, the saints must be on guard. Vigilance is required. “Bad company corrupts good character,” I Corinthians 15:33. The influence of fellow saints, the encouragement of other believers is a great aid to remaining faithful. When these are lost, special care must be taken to stay on course, Deuteronomy 11:22,23.

   The greatest tragedy in life is to lose God and never miss Him.

Joshua was sending his brothers away. He would not see them again. It was similar to parents sending their children into the world. He wanted them to go. But he wanted them to make wise choices, Deuteronomy 30:19,20. Therefore, Joshua plead with them. He knew the dangers. He also knew that it was possible to remain faithful to the Lord, Deuteronomy 30:11-14. It was up to them. Their future was in their hands.

   Thank you, Father, for Your word. It is a sure guide to eternal life. My flesh is weak. Help me be careful to love You, walk in Your ways, and serve you faithfully. I beg, on bended knee, through Christ, my Lord, Amen.
“There are three that testify,” I John 5:7.

“Everyone born of God overcomes the world,” I John 5:4a. He triumphs over the wickedness that saturates society, I John 2:16. This great victory is the result of faith in Jesus Christ, I John 5:4b,5.

“Faith comes from hearing,” hearing the message of qualified witnesses, Romans 10:17. Evidence has always been (and continues to be) established by the affirmation of two or three who testify, Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; II Corinthians 13:1.

God practiced the same principle of multiple witnesses. Jesus did, too, John 5:31-40. The text of this devotional echoes His words. There are three that testify that Jesus is the Christ.

• **The baptism.** The Lord “came by water,” I John 5:6a. He left His private life in Nazareth and entered His public ministry at His baptism. As He was coming to the Jordan, John the Baptist testified: “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,” John 1:29. And, when Jesus was baptized, “heaven was opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased,’” Matthew 3:16,17. The testimony is clear. The Redeemer has come.

• **The crucifixion.** Calvary also gave witness. Jesus is the Messiah. “The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split,” Matthew 27:51. “When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and what had happened, they...exclaimed, ‘Surely He was the Son of God,’” Matthew 27:54. “He did not come by water only, but by water and blood,” I John 5:6b.

• **The Spirit.** “And it is the Spirit who testifies,” I John 5:6c. He bore witness to Jesus at His baptism. He bore witness to His apostles after He ascended back to heaven, John 15:26. The Spirit bears witness to us now, I John 3:24. “There are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement,” I John 5:7,8. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God!

“We accept the testimony of man, but the testimony of God is greater,” I John 5:9.

The baptism, the crucifixion, and the Spirit are proof that Jesus was the Messiah. These events still have significance. They are constant voices of God speaking to us in tones loud and clear. “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son,” I John 5:11. Hence, without apology, the conclusion is plain. “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life,” I John 5:12.

*O God, You could not have made it clearer. The testimony is flawless. Jesus is the Messiah. He is my victory over sin, my hope of life everlasting. With Him I have a future. Through Him, I pray, with humble thanks, Amen.*
October 18


Saul was chosen king, I Samuel 10:24. Some of the people were eager for him to rule. Others were not so inclined, I Samuel 10:27a. Leaders assume grave responsibilities. They need the support of sympathetic followers.


• The different dispositions of men. Every group is made up of people with diverse opinions. These opinions often lie dormant until challenged. God chose Saul to rule over Israel, I Samuel 9:16,17. In spite of divine sanction, some “troublemakers” objected. Reason should have prevailed. It did not. Uncooperative adversaries rebelled. They insulted Saul, I Samuel 10:27b. A single decision ignited a firestorm of protest.

• The invaluable worth of friends. After being anointed king, Saul went home. He was accompanied by a band of men kindly disposed toward his new position, I Samuel 10:26. Their hearts were “touched” by God. The touch of heaven empowered them for service, Jeremiah 1:9,10. This band of helpers was likely a voluntary bodyguard. The counsel and support of these comrades was a great encouragement, cf. Acts 28:15. When God calls men to work, He recruits others to help, Psalms 110:3. When their sympathy is genuine, it renders an invaluable service, Philippians 1:27.

• The wise treatment of troublemakers. The opponents of Saul questioned his right to rule, I Samuel 11:12. Perhaps they were envious. Certainly they were careless. They failed to recognize the hand of God. The troublemakers were contemptuous, rude, and disloyal. They disobeyed the law, Exodus 22:28. Saul could have justly punished them as traitors. Instead, he “kept silent,” I Samuel 10:27c. The king heard their disrespect. He saw their childish behavior. He silenced their insolence with silence. He turned the other cheek, Matthew 5:39. He let God resolve the problem, cf. Acts 5:38,39; Romans 12:19.

Saul did not search for assistance. The touch of heaven provided the friends he needed. A faithful, supportive band of men stood by him. Willing yokefellows helped him carry his burdens. They were an indispensable aid in the early days of his administration.

Jesus had helpers—men and women who stood by Him, who cared for His needs, Luke 8:1-3. Paul had helpers, too, Philemon 23,24. These co-laborers were the joy of his ministry. How lonely to serve without those touched by the hand of God! Every Church needs valiant helpers. The game is lost when all the effort is left to one player. Each member in the Body of Christ is touched by God. The Church will move ahead when everyone takes his place and does his part as the Lord intended, Ephesians 4:16.

Lord, You have called me to serve. I want to support, encourage, and care for those who lead Your people. Help me do my part. In Him, Amen.
October 19

“He was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe.” Acts 24:26.

Felix was the governor of Judea. As a Roman politician, he exercised considerable power. He was a tyrant who used his authority to manipulate people, to get his way. He ruled with a harsh, cruel, and oppressive hand.

Paul confronted Felix, and his third wife, Drusilla, about “righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come,” Acts 24:25. The governor was acquainted with Christianity, Acts 24:22a. He would not budge. Fear consumed his heart. He had had enough.

Though he listened courteously, Felix had little use for truth. He was really “hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe,” Acts 24:26. Bribes are intended to influence those in power, to get them to do favors for the ones who pay the highest price. Bribes pervert justice, I Samuel 8:3; Proverbs 17:23. The law prohibited bribery, Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 16:19. The prophets boldly condemned the practice, Isaiah 1:23; Micah 3:11; 7:3. Bribes enrich the corrupt, impoverish the poor, and derail any quest for truth.

“Be careful no one entices you by riches; do not let a large bribe turn you aside,” Job 36:18.

- **Bribes blur judgment.** Dishonest money destroys the mind. It hardens the heart. Payola twists justice. It blurs the lines between right and wrong, good and evil, Isaiah 5:22,23. Legal decisions tainted with corrupt cash are a mockery of the law. Self interest takes over. Immoral motives rule. Felix suffered from the infectious influence of bribery. His government was awash in innocent blood, held in place by the cruel axiom that “might makes right.” Those who appeared before Felix issued polite lies to stroke his inflated ego, Acts 24:2,3. The whole scene was a pompous charade devoid of compassion and integrity.

- **Bribes cause blindness.** The wrong person was on trial. Paul was innocent, Acts 24:10-13. Felix knew it. Still he played the game. He “left Paul in prison” to please the accusers, Acts 24:27. He hoped the apostle would try to buy his release, cf. Proverbs 18:16. Felix certainly knew that Christians helped one another during times of distress. He may have been aware that Paul had just collected a benevolence offering, I Corinthians 16:1-3. Hence, Felix might naturally suppose that he had a good chance of enriching himself. Nothing so quickly blinds a man as the spirit of covetousness.

Felix dressed like a king. He functioned like a criminal. He broke the cardinal rule of a good administrator, Deuteronomy 1:17a. Felix was a scoundrel. He stooped to almost anything for personal gain. He lived in a ruthless world where ideals were smothered by selfish enterprise. Felix stood at the threshold of truth but allowed money to keep him from embracing it.

_In this broken world, Father, the righteous suffer. Crooked judges ignore the law. Bribes pollute the system. Truth is sold to the highest bidder. But You will make it right. I long to see Your justice. May it come quickly, Amen._
“(God will) equip you with everything good for doing His will,” Hebrews 13:21.

The Book of Hebrews ends with a powerful prayer. In one, long sentence, the writer sums up His entire letter, Hebrews 13:20,21. His words give hope. His thoughts offer assurance. The prayer is addressed to the “God of peace.” The Hebrew believers lived during a time of political turmoil and religious persecution. The Lord brings reconciliation between Himself and man, Luke 7:48,50; Romans 5:1.


- **What He did.** Israel had many shepherds. There was Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, and the prophets. All of them lead the flock of God. However, Jesus was the “great Shepherd.” He laid down His life for the sheep, Acts 20:28. He rose from the grave, I Peter 1:21. Redemption was purchased. He completed His assignment.

- **What He will do.** The great Shepherd is still leading His sheep. He intercedes for the saints from His throne on high, Romans 8:34. Hence, the writer of Hebrews asks God to grant His people all they need to do His will, Hebrews 13:20,21. To some, the need is the grace of perseverance, a fresh vision of the suffering of Christ, Hebrews 12:2,3. To others, it is a warning that they are sons of God, Hebrews 12:7-10. To many, it is a clearer understanding in the midst of doubt, the humility to do small tasks happily, the joy of forgiving those who hurt them. The promise is plain. God will equip us “with everything good for doing His will,” Hebrews 13:21.

The task ahead is never greater than the Power who assigned it.

The Lord never asks us to do something without supplying the power to do it, I Peter 5:10. He outlines “in advance” our tasks, Ephesians 2:10. He ordains leaders to “prepare” us “for works of service,” Ephesians 4:11,12. He gives us His inspired word so that we “may be thoroughly equipped for every good work,” II Timothy 3:16,17. He provides the resources to meet the challenge, II Corinthians 9:8. He works in us “to will and to act according to His good purpose,” Philippians 2:13. There is no reason to fail. There is every reason to succeed.

The Lord provides the path to salvation. He also gives the strength to walk therein. We are encouraged to remain confident. When we have done the will of God, we “will be richly rewarded,” will receive all that He promised, Hebrews 10:35,36.

October 21

"The law is paralyzed and justice never prevails," Habakkuk 1:4.

There is a deep sense in human beings that life ought to be fair. Moral integrity should reside at the roots of existence. Things do not merely happen. They happen for a reason. If the reason can be discovered, then painful experiences can be understood. The logic of all social ills is supposedly knowable. And, if they are knowable, then they are comprehensible.

- **Injustice in society.** Habakkuk lived in a time of gross immorality. It had been that way since the beginning, Genesis 6:5; Job 24:1-12. Violence was everywhere. Evil men caused pain for their own personal gain, Jeremiah 22:13. The righteous protested to no avail. Lawyers were deceitful. Judges were corrupt. Honesty had been abandoned. The wicked plotted against the righteous, Psalms 37:12. Though people honored God with their lips, their hearts were far from Him, Matthew 15:8. The law was paralyzed. It was numb, frozen, and ineffective. Justice was perverted, Habakkuk 1:4. Criminals ran free. The innocent languished in prison. Vice flaunted its naughtiness in public. Why did God make men look at injustice? Why does He tolerate wrong? Habakkuk 1:3a.

- **Indifference of God.** Jehovah did not seem to care. He allowed nations to go "their own way," Acts 14:16. He did not lift a finger to make things right. "When a land falls into the hands of the wicked, He blindfolds its judges. If it is not (God), then who is it?" Job 9:24. We stand in the middle of a deep mystery. Surely God cannot be God if He is indifferent to evil, Psalms 11:7; 111:7; 145:17; Isaiah 57:15; 1 Peter 1:15,16. If He hates iniquity, why is punishment delayed? Habakkuk 1:13. Could it be that He waits so that the righteous can be purified in the crucible of temptation? Could it be He allows the wicked time to repent or opportunity to justify their eventual destruction?

- **Ineffectiveness of prayer.** Habakkuk was stunned by the wickedness of those who treated others like fish, Habakkuk 1:14-17. Believers agonized over such evil, Psalms 119:136; Jeremiah 9:1. When will it stop? Habakkuk 1:2. The Lord is the hearer of prayers, Psalms 65:2. He encourages us to call on Him "in the day of trouble," Psalms 50:15. So we pray. Yet there is no response. Like Job, we cry out to God, but He does not answer, Job 30:20; cf. Psalms 22:1,2. Our faith is tested. God certainly promised to respond, but He will do so in His time and in His way.

There are three answers to prayer—Yes! No! Wait!

We remain on alert. God will step into history when the situation is right. He asks us to wait for Him, Habakkuk, 2:3. The Lord will act. Evil will be judged. Righteousness will be rewarded. The saints must never lose hope, Psalms 72:16,17. Iniquity may triumph for a season, but God sees the tears of His children. He hears their prayers. His answer may be delayed. Yet, in due time, His blessings will appear, Habakkuk 3:17,18.

Life does not always make sense, Lord. What should be does not always happen. What should not occur often becomes the norm. But I still believe. In Jesus, Amen.
“(They will) serve Him shoulder to shoulder,” Zephaniah 3:9.

The prophet predicted the judgments of God, Zephaniah 1:2,3. He railed against the idolatry of Judah, Zephaniah 1:4-6. The Day of the Lord was near. It would be a bitter calamity, Zephaniah 1:14-18. Beyond the devastation, however, God would renew His love, Zephaniah 3:14,15. He would dwell with His people, Zephaniah 3:16,17.

The mercy and wrath of God are like the sun and moon: when one rises the other sets.

When the judgments of God had done their work, Jehovah would restore Israel. The old ways of wickedness would be abandoned. Only the “meek and humble” would remain, Zephaniah 3:11,12. A holy disposition would fill the redeemed, Zephaniah 3:9.

- **Purity in speech.** The tongue is a mirror of the heart. Sinners think immoral thoughts, use foul language and make filthy jests. Such is “out of place” among the saints, Ephesians 5:4. Uncharitable talk, frivolous chatter, and unsavory conversation work mischief. The godly will have none of it. “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,” Proverbs 10:11. It brings “healing,” Proverbs 15:4. It “spreads knowledge,” Proverbs 15:7. Zephaniah pictures the renewal of God in terms of wholesome speech.

- **Devotion to God.** The prime mover in all religious awakenings is God, I Corinthians 15:9,10. His grace turns people away from their sinful practices. With newfound devotion, they “call on the name of the Lord,” Zephaniah 3:9. The phrase “call on the Lord” meant to worship Him, Genesis 12:8; Romans 10:13. It meant to seek (and expect) the help of heaven. The tendency of man is to pull away from God. But, when the Lord changes the heart, humans search for Him, Ezekiel 36:26,27. And, when they seek Him, they will find Him, Acts 17:26,27.

- **Work of love.** The purity in speech and the devotion to God goes full circle. When renewal is genuine, it will lead to works of service. Men will not merely honor Him with their lips. They will offer themselves as “instruments of righteousness,” Romans 6:13. They are not their own. They are bought with a price. The redeemed will work side by side, “shoulder to shoulder,” Zephaniah 3:9. They will live and work together “in singleness of heart,” Jeremiah 32:39.

Israel had a bright future. The wrath of God would be replaced by the mercy of heaven. Zephaniah looked beyond the terrible trials. He “spoke of the grace that was to come,” I Peter 1:10,11. Zephaniah spoke of things he little understood, cf. Isaiah 19:23-25. Still he recognized and rejoiced in God working for the well-being of all mankind. We should, too. The trials of today will be lost in the blessings of tomorrow. May that day come soon.

*Father in heaven, it is a great privilege to work shoulder to shoulder with You and Your children. Send Your grace. Renew my heart. I call on You in hope of a bright future. Through Him who makes it all possible, Amen.*
-Life is incomprehensible. Things do not always work out like we think they should. The righteous suffer. The wicked prosper. Calamities fall on good folks and blessings descend on bad people, Ecclesiastes 7:15.

-Life is mysterious. That such things occur in a world presided over by a wise and powerful God is undoubtedly hard to understand. Yet He “who had no sin,” II Corinthians 5:21, was “numbered with the transgressors” Isaiah 53:12. The ways of God are beyond finding out, Romans 11:33; cf. Job 11:7-9.

Because of the inequities in life, men rush to conclusions that cannot be sustained. They deny divine providence. They suppose God is indifferent to moral distinctions. They decide that piety has no purpose. The presence of such perplexing phenomena is painful. No argument can solve them. No exercise of faith can charm them away. Many desire to see and hear the deeper things of God but are denied such privileged information, Luke 10:24.

The ways of God are a mystery.
Reject them and life becomes a riddle.
Believe them and history is explained.

In the meantime, what should we do? Enjoy life and not pine after impossible ideals, Ecclesiastes 2:24; 3:22; 5:18; 8:15. This is not a recommendation for sinful excess or brutish indulgence. For “it is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting,” Ecclesiastes 7:2. This much is certain. God does all things according to His infinite will, Daniel 4:35; Ephesians 1:11. Our finite minds are incapable of knowing all His secrets. We should leave the ultimate issues of running the universe to His discretion. He knows best.

Lord, this world is a confusing place. What should be often is not. What should not be regularly is. But I trust in Your providence. Your will be done in Your way and in Your time. This is my prayer, in Him who holds all things together, Amen.
October 24

“You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in You,” Isaiah 26:3.

Isaiah breaks out in a song of praise. The prophet celebrates trust in Jehovah. The theme focuses on a city which the Lord saves in a time of distress, Isaiah 26:1; cf. Isaiah 1:26. The city represents the faithful saints, Isaiah 26:2. The citizens of the redeemed city acknowledge the work of God. They honor no other name but His, Isaiah 26:12,13. For them, Jehovah is the Rock—an eternal place of security, Isaiah 26:4. He is safety in a dangerous situation, Psalms 40:2. Truly God is someone on whom believers can rely.

“The Lord blesses His people with peace,” Psalms 29:11.

- **Peace of God.** Peace means much more than the absence of war. It suggests harmony and contentment. It indicates an unimpaired relationship with others. The true child of God has peace within and without—with God, with man, and with self—in all situations toward everyone and everything. The conscience is tranquil. The mind is at ease. The emotions are quiet. The heart is serene. Such peace “passes all understanding,” Philippians 4:7. It is given by God, John 14:27. It cannot be taken away by a doctor, a policeman, a bill collector, or an enemy. “In this world, you may have trouble,” Jesus said. “But take heart! I have overcome the world,” John 16:33.

- **Trust of man.** Man can trust in “things” but moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal, Matthew 6:19. Man can trust in “self” but his life is not his own, he is not able to direct his steps, Jeremiah 10:23. Abiding peace comes from above. It is the result of trust in God, Isaiah 26:3. Man must make peace with God before he can have the peace of God. Then, when he thinks like God, loves like God, and behaves like God, he can enjoy peace in God, II Peter 1:2. As it is written, “those who know Your name will trust in You, for You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek You, Psalms 9:10.

The text of this devotional study is good news for troubled souls. There are multitudes who can bear testimony to its truth. While weary with struggle and baffled by failure, they found peace when they cast their burdens on Him, I Peter 5:7.

All of this is promised to those whose mind is firmly fixed on God, Psalms 112:7,8. The believer is resolute, trusting in Jehovah regardless of the circumstances. For he knows that God has plans for him—plans to prosper him, plans to give him hope, Jeremiah 29:11. The essential thing is persistent dependence on the Lord who says, “Peace, peace, to those far and near,” Isaiah 57:19. And, again, He says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me,” John 14:1.

Those are welcome words, Father. Your shalom is my anchor in a hopeless and unstable world. I fix my eyes on Your promise. I trust in Your power to make it happen. Through Him, who is the Prince of peace, Amen.
“We always remember…your faith,…love, and…hope,” I Thessalonians 1:3.

Faith, love, and hope are often joined together, Romans 5:1-3; I Corinthians 13:13; Colossians 1:3-5; Hebrews 6:10-12; I Peter 1:3-8. This grand trilogy is a beautiful bouquet. Its fragrance sweetens the Church. Its aroma sets believers apart. Faith, love, and hope are distinguishing characteristics of the born again.

There is a difference between having character and being a character.

- **Work produced by faith.** Though saved by faith, Ephesians 2:8,9, every child of God is “created in Christ Jesus to do good work,” Ephesians 2:10. Faith is not merely a philosophical idea to be discussed. It is a conviction to be acted upon. Faith has goals, II Corinthians 4:16,17. Faith demands action, James 2:14-26. How a Christian serves speaks volumes about what he believes. Does he work in order to gain a reward? Does he toil with a grim sense of duty? Does he plod ahead in fear of judgment? His reason for serving says much about his understanding of God. The Thessalonians were commended for their work produced by faith in Jesus Christ, II Thessalonians 1:11.

- **Labor prompted by love.** Work is drudgery in the absence of love. The finest sermon is simply noise without it. The grandest generosity is meaningless when unaccompanied by it, I Corinthians 13:1-3. The greatest command is to love God and neighbors, Mark 12:30,31. It requires strenuous effort and constant forgiveness, Matthew 18:21,22. Jesus forgave the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, the brutality of the Romans, and the cowardice of His disciples. “Forgive them,” He said, “they do not know what they are doing.” Luke 23:34a. It was not easy for Him. Why should we expect it to be easy for us? Matthew 10:24,25.

- **Endurance inspired by hope.** Christianity does not rest on empty optimism or passive resignation. Faith is fortified by hope—hope grounded in the resurrection, focused on an unfading future in heaven, shielded by the power of God. The world says, “As long as there is life there is hope.” The believer says “Beyond this life there is hope.” The firm unwavering confidence of the saint stands in stark contrast to the desperate wish of the sinner. Christians have a hope that assures, Hebrews 6:19, and protects, I Thessalonians 5:8. It is hope based on something greater than self—hope in Jesus Christ, I Thessalonians 1:3.

Faith, love, and hope are like a cord of three strands. “It is not quickly broken,” Ecclesiastes 4:12. Faith, love, and hope are mutually inclusive. They belong together. Love rescues faith from fanaticism. Hope is an idle dream without faith. Hope and faith are cold formalities unless warmed by love. The believer is misshapen and lopsided without all three. They blend together to form a strong, winsome follower of God.

*Lord, I wish to be whole, strong, and complete. You have given me the building blocks. May faith, love, and hope become the secure foundation of my life. In Him, Amen.*
October 26

“The Lord be with you,” I Samuel 17:37.

The situation was desperate. Goliath issued a challenge, I Samuel 17:8-10. The soldiers of Israel were intimidated, I Samuel 17:11. The giant taunted them morning and evening for forty days, I Samuel 17:16. Finally a brash lad stepped forward. David volunteered to fight Goliath, I Samuel 17:32. By all reckoning, this appeared to be a huge mismatch!

King Saul rejected his offer, I Samuel 17:33. The confidence of David seemed to be no more than youthful enthusiasm. But the king was mistaken. Saul only saw the giant. David saw the power of God, I Samuel 17:34-37a. The difference is vital.

- **A basic truth.** The power of God is available to all believers in moments of difficulty, II Corinthians 12:7-10. This is not wistful thinking. It is everyday experience. Israel had forgotten the mighty interventions of heaven. No wonder they were afraid. David recalled the strength of God. He was reassured, I Samuel 17:40. Unbelievers see the opposition. Believers see the invisible hand of the Lord, Psalms 77:10-15. It is a basic truth. God “does not lie or change His mind,” I Samuel 15:29. Because He is our refuge, we sing in the shadow of His wings, Psalms 63:7,8. We face the future because of experiences in the past, II Corinthians 1:8-10.

- **A revealed fact.** David trusted the gracious providence of God. He believed the Lord would keep His promises, Psalms 89:34. His slingshot was a common instrument of war, I Chronicles 12:1,2. It was a lethal weapon, Judges 20:16. But David relied on the Lord Almighty, I Samuel 17:45-47. His aid in times of despair is well documented. It is a revealed fact. We have good reason to hope in Jehovah. When the Church is challenged, when the honor of the saints is at stake, we can step forward with confidence. We can rely on the inspired truth. “Surely He is with us to the very end of the age,” Matthew 28:20; cf. Deuteronomy 31:6; I Kings 8:57; Haggai 1:13; Acts 18:10.

The Lord protects those who trust in Him.

Saul permitted David to fight Goliath. The king gave his blessing. “The Lord be with you,” he said, I Samuel 17:37b. God was with David, I Samuel 18:14. We can have a similar experience if we have a similar faith. Former mercies can provide present trust for future conflicts. Every victory produces greater boldness.

The Lord has a relationship with all people. His power upholds the world. He sends sunshine and rain on the just and the unjust, Matthew 5:43-45. This was true of David and Goliath. Yet what God was to the one he was not to the other. There was a closeness to David which Goliath did not know, Psalms 1:6. He is with us when we are with Him. That is a basic truth, a revealed fact.

_Holy Father, You promised to be with me. Why should I doubt? You are still active in history. Why should I worry? Through Him, who is always present, Amen._
October 27

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise,” Proverbs 11:30.


Because of their good behavior, the wise “will enjoy the fruit of their deeds,” Isaiah 3:10; cf. Jeremiah 32:17-19. They will be a “tree of life” to those wandering in the shadows of sin, Proverbs 13:14. The wise exert a good influence on others. By their wholesome behavior, the wise win souls.

- Greatest achievement. The wise gain wealth, understanding, and honor. They are given high positions and important titles. But their grandest achievement is the winning of souls, Daniel 12:3. It is both an opportunity and a responsibility of the highest magnitude. A soul winner changes the course of history, hides a “multitude of sins,” James 5:19,20; cf. Psalms 32:1; 85:2; 1 Peter 4:8. A winner of souls gives joy of the purest kind to the angels in heaven, Luke 15:10. He is eager to spread the Good News, Romans 1:14,15. He lets his light shine before men “that they may see his good deeds” and praise the Father in heaven, Matthew 5:16.

- Hardest assignment. The winner of souls must be dedicated. His task is difficult to do. He must oppose supernatural hostilities, Ephesians 6:12. A soul winner battles the forces of resistance, the inclination to procrastinate, the spiritual blindness that wraps the world in darkness, 2 Timothy 2:24-26. The winner of souls must silence—with love and patience—the voices that delude the truth and deceive the unaware. The assignment is beyond the endurance of the fainthearted. It requires stamina and flexibility, 1 Corinthians 9:19,22,23. Soul winners suffer setbacks. Only the hardy stay the course, keep the faith, and finish the race, 2 Timothy 4:7,8.

If you talk to the Lord about others, you will soon talk to others about the Lord.

There is much truth in the old saying: “I would rather see a sermon than hear one any day.” The Lord wants His followers to have the Gospel on their lips as well as in the lives, 1 Peter 2:12. Jesus was a soul winner. That was the purpose of His life, Matthew 20:28. We should walk in His steps and follow His example, 1 Peter 2:9. When we reflect the goodness of Him who called us out of darkness and into His wonderful life, we “make the teaching about God our Savior attractive,” Titus 2:10. Soul winning glorifies God, John 15:8. It snatches the lost from the flames of eternal destruction, Jude 22,23.

Sovereign Lord, I want to be a soul winner. May the lost find You through me as I demonstrate Your presence in my life. And, when this happens, may You receive all the glory. In Christ Jesus, who showed the way, Amen.
October 28

“No one came to my support, but everyone deserted me,” II Timothy 4:16.

Paul was near the end of his life, II Timothy 4:6. In a reminiscent mood, he looked back. He vividly recalled his “first defense,” II Timothy 4:16. No one stood by him. Demas “deserted” him, II Timothy 4:10. Everyone from “Asia” left him, II Timothy 1:15. Why did his fellow workers forsake him? Were they afraid? Or, since no one had stood up to accuse Paul, did they assume he would be released? Acts 28:21. Whatever the reason, the apostle was alone.

• Paul was abandoned. To confess being a Christian was dangerous. To associate with a notorious leader of an illegal religion was risky. Demas “loved this world,” II Timothy 4:9,10a; cf. I John 2:15,16. Demas preferred the good life—safety from peril and comfort of home. He abandoned Paul. The apostle felt the same stabbing pain of desertion that Jesus felt on the cross, Matthew 27:46. No one knew better than Paul how precarious his situation was. No one knew better how weak-hearted many brethren are. No one knew better how painful it is to be forsaken in the hour of need, cf. Job 6:14-23. Paul was not abandoned. Though deserted by man, the Lord “stood at the side” of the apostle, II Timothy 4:17a. Paul felt “persecuted but not abandoned,” II Corinthians 4:9a. Jesus had the same experience: left but not left alone, John 16:32. God never forsakes those who seek Him, Psalms 9:10; 37:25,32,33; Isaiah 41:17. Though, at times, it may appear that He has abandoned His people, Psalms 22:1, the Lord will prove faithful in the end, Psalms 22:24; cf. Deuteronomy 31:8. This is encouraging. It offers hope in the dark hours of hopelessness.

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair,” II Corinthians 4:8.

If we seek the Lord, He will not forsake us. However, if we abandon Him, He will abandon us, II Chronicles 15:1,2; cf. Isaiah 2:6-9. It is certain the Lord will do His part. He gives us every opportunity to thrive. If there is a failure, the blame will fall on our doorstep, Isaiah 5:1-7. God is faithful. He remains committed to those who are committed to Him. Should He appear to desert us, the feeling of desertion will be temporary, Isaiah 54:7.

The choice to forsake God is always a willful, rebellious act, Hebrews 3:12. Though humans are fickle, the Lord is reliable, II Timothy 2:13. “Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you,” He promised, Hebrews 13:5. Hence, should we be so unfortunate to feel abandoned by men, we can be certain God will rescue us from every evil attack. He will bring us safely to His heavenly kingdom, II Timothy 4:18. The Lord is good.

Thank You, kind Father, for Your gracious, unfailing promise. Your faithfulness inspires me to be faithful. If I feel lonesome, I can know I am not alone. Through Christ, who always stands by my side, Amen.
October 29

“God reigns over the nations,” Psalms 47:8.

In the hurry of daily life, the faithful are called to be still, Psalms 46:10. The saints are invited to recognize the sovereignty of God. They will see His powerful influence among the nations, His undisputed control over the earth, Deuteronomy 4:35; Isaiah 37:16a.

The more people understand Him, the more they will sing praises to His name, Psalms 47:6. This is not a senseless outburst, an emotional frenzy. It is a quiet look at the past. It is a careful contemplation of the present. It is a reasonable glimpse into the future. The Most High rules over everything and everyone, Daniel 4:34c,35.


- **Rules over all the earth**, Psalms 47:1-4. There is danger in divorcing weekend worship and weekday work, separating Christ from career. The world is not split into His part and our part, His time and our time. That is a human tendency. It is not a divine reality, Psalms 24:1. Jehovah is an awesome God twenty-four/seven. Everything belongs to Him, Psalms 50:9-12. He subdues nations. He rules with absolute power. Nothing can change that. No one can depose Him. God gave all authority to His Son, Matthew 28:18. Men tried to take it away. God overruled their rebellion. Now the nail pierced hands want to share that authority with the faithful, Revelation 2:26,27. The King has spoken. He rules. The saints will rule with Him, Revelation 3:21.

- **Rules over all the nations**, Psalms 47:7-9. The wisdom of God is profound. His power is vast, Job 25:2. “He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot counted,” Job 5:9. “The Lord is the great God, the great King over all gods,” Psalms 95:3. No one is His equal. Everyone is His subject. He reigns over nations. He is seated on His holy throne. The nations will yield to His power. They will gather before Him as His people. Cultural barriers will melt. Racial divisions will disappear. The Lord will bring peace— destroying the “dividing wall of hostilities,” Ephesians 2:14. He will gather the scattered children of God—bringing them together and making them one, John 11:52. Then there will be “one flock and one shepherd,” John 10:16. “He will not falter or be discouraged” till all of this comes to pass, Isaiah 42:4a.

God reigns! The nations clap their hands. They shout for joy. The people sing praises to His great name. They reverently pray “Your kingdom come.” And, with grateful anticipation, they beg that it will come quickly--the sooner the better. They stand watching, wishing, and hoping that soon—and very soon—God will step forward in His regal splendor. Then “the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord,” Revelation 11:15.

*I cannot imagine how great You are, how wonderful Your kingdom will be. But, Lord, I long to sit by Your side, to reign with You throughout eternity. Till that great day, I continue to pray and wait. In Your Son, Amen.*
October 30

“Proclaim His salvation,” I Chronicles 16:23.

God is a God who saves. “Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens,” Psalms 68:19. Jehovah was known as “the God of salvation.” Though unaware of the full extent of their previous peril, the saved proclaim the deliverance of God, Psalms 71:15. The message is too good to keep, II Kings 7:9a. All day long their tongues declare the great news, Psalms 66:16; 71:24.

- **Salvation of God.** The word “salvation” means liberation from those who seek to harm, Exodus 2:15-17; 14:30. Israel became known as the people “saved by the Lord,” Deuteronomy 33:29. His deeds of salvation were a witness to His sovereignty, Psalms 106:8; cf. I Samuel 4:5-8. He saved them from foreign invaders, Judges 2:16. Sometimes God used human agents to bring salvation (though the obstacles overcome were so spectacular that in reality the victory belonged to the Lord), I Samuel 17:47; cf. Psalms 44:6,7; Hosea 1:7. Nothing can hinder God from saving, I Samuel 14:6. On Him rests human deliverance, Psalms 62:7. Salvation is the safety and security necessary to live unafraid in the midst of threatening dangers.

- **Response of man.** The salvation of God reveals His universal rule, Isaiah 33:22. His sovereignty over the entire earth allows Him to save all men, Psalms 74:12. His ability to save is the reason for worship. Only a god who can save is worthy of praise, Isaiah 46:5-7; cf. Judges 6:31. Therefore, apart from Jehovah “there is no savior,” Isaiah 43:11; Hosea 13:4. To ensure that His deeds of salvation are not merely coincidence, the Lord declares His intentions before He rescues, Isaiah 43:12. Salvation is the love of God in action, Deuteronomy 7:7,8. Salvation is His presence among His people, Exodus 3:12; Jeremiah 1:8,19. When in distress, man should call on Him in prayer, Psalms 70:1-5. God responds to a contrite heart, to a humble plea for help, Job 22:29; Psalms 34:18. God chooses the opportune time to save. Man must wait in hope, Isaiah 30:15. During the delay, the believers should be involved in gracious conduct and loving deeds, Isaiah 56:1; Hosea 10:12; 12:6.

His mercies appear each day,  
And hover around us while we pray.

The saved proclaim His salvation. They lift their voices in song and sermon. “The Lord Almighty is with us!” they shout, Psalms 46:7a. The redeemed speak a good word for God. Often it is done—and maybe best done—by what we are and what we do. We show forth the salvation of God with words and works, with lip and life, I Corinthians 10:31. We speak of His rescue. We rejoice in His salvation. We proclaim His mercy. We broadcast the news of our wonderful Savior.

*You are my Redeemer, Lord. Thank You for saving me. May I tell the world of Your grace and goodness. May I live as if I am redeemed. Through Him, who is my Messiah, Amen.*
October 31

“We do not make requests of You because we are righteous but because of Your great mercy, Daniel 9:18.

Daniel offered a prayer for pardon. In its tone and style, in its purpose and plea, the prayer was a model of intercessory petition. The prophet prepared himself for an encounter with God, Daniel 9:3. Human preparation and divine reception are closely related, Deuteronomy 9:9. There is no value in outward confession if it is unaccompanied by inward contrition, Luke 18:9-14.

- **Character of intercessory prayer.** The plea of Daniel is marked by several characteristics. (1) It was filled with confession, Daniel 9:5-8. The exile was a direct result of sin, Daniel 9:16. Forgiveness was only possible after repentance, Acts 3:19, and confession, 1 John 1:9. (2) It was stated with urgency. Daniel prayed with passion, Daniel 9:11b-13. He opened his heart. He laid bare his soul. God hears requests for pardon in proportion to the earnestness in which they are offered, Luke 18:1-7. (3) It was uttered with faith. In his distress, Daniel sought the assistance of God. It was against God that Israel had sinned. Yet Daniel believed that the Lord was merciful and forgiving, Daniel 9:9. His judgments were right, Daniel 9:14. The prophet persisted in pleading with God because he believed in the kindness of heaven.

- **Content of intercessory prayer.** The prayer for pardon was distinctive in its content. (1) It had a high view of God. The prophet saw the Lord as great and awesome, Daniel 9:4a. There was no God like Him—none His equal, none His peer, Exodus 15:11; Psalms 77:13. He kept His covenant with all who obeyed His commands, Daniel 9:4b. Whether the agreement is written in the book of the Law or in the Gospel of His Son, the Lord is faithful. (2) It had a firm belief in forgiveness. Even when man disobeyed, God still forgave, Leviticus 26:40-45. He heard the prayers of His servants, Daniel 9:17. He was more honored by forgiveness (which destroyed sin) than by anger (which punished it). (3) It had a fervent request. The prophet was focused. He wanted God to notice the dire straits of His people, Daniel 9:18a. Daniel wanted God to do something about their desperate condition, Daniel 9:19. He wished for speedy relief. He begged on the basis of what God was rather than what man did, Daniel 9:18b.

> Not by works of my hands, can I make my demands. All my efforts cannot atone. My hope is in You alone.

Prayer exerted a great influence over national affairs. It moved the hands that hold the world. Daniel was mightier on his knees than Darius was on his throne. Daniel was in communication with the King of kings. He was admitted to the throne room of the Most High. Daniel helped mold history. Darius is all but forgotten by history.

> Gracious God, my nation is not listening to Your word. Your commands are disregarded. The people flaunt their wickedness, revel in their mischief. Doom hastens. Have mercy in judgment. Forgive. Through Christ, I beg, Amen.
November 1

“You have gone too far!” Numbers 16:3.

Every group has its rebels. They harbor negative feelings, Jude 16. And, when their objections fester, mutiny is close at hand. They are motivated by evil. They disrespect authority, II Peter 2:10a. When they press their opinions, they divide the group, Jude 19.

Moses often faced discontent. The rebellion of Korah was most troubling. It included many people—community leaders—who worked together as an organized conspiracy, Numbers 16:1,2. Their dissent was public. Their sin was envy, Psalms 106:16.

• The ringleader. Korah was from the same tribe and the same family as Moses (and his brother Aaron). They were distant cousins, cf. Numbers 16:1 and I Chronicles 6:54. As a member of the Kohathite family, Korah had important responsibilities, Numbers 4:1-20. Korah was a man of careful planning. He waited patiently for an opportune occasion. He was a schemer. He drew compatriots into his plot slowly, cautiously, and secretly. He had visions of great things for himself. He got as far as he could in an orderly way. He wanted more, Numbers 16:8-11. Moses blocked his path. The plan of Korah was clear. He was a man of ambition. He wanted to step over Moses into the leadership of Israel.

• The rebellion. Those who rebel against established authority offer reasonable pretexts. Earlier Miriam and Aaron opposed Moses. “Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has He not also spoken through us?” they asked, Numbers 12:2. And now Korah chimed in with his objection. It appears that Korah believed himself to be more holy than the rest of Israel, Numbers 16:3. These statements were true—to a point—but an insufficient rationale for insubordination. The saints must be on guard against bitterness, Hebrews 12:15. One Korah can create more havoc than ten pious parishioners.

• The resolution. Moses was the humblest of men, Numbers 12:3. Still he was not spineless. He faced the insurrection with patient resolve. He deferred to the Lord, Numbers 16:4-7. The outcome was not in doubt. Yet Moses paused. He slept overnight on the matter. Perhaps he prayed for Korah. The conspirators were belligerent, Numbers 16:12-14. They refused to talk to Moses. Korah rallied his troops. He brought them before Moses the next day, Numbers 16:16-19. It was a sobering scene, Numbers 16:28-30. God acted decisively, Numbers 16:31-33. They had gone too far.

We spend half our time crying for leaders and the other half nailing them to a cross!

Korah could have been an outstanding helper in the kingdom of God. Instead, he is remembered as a traitor. He died as a troublemaker. He left behind an infamous name, Numbers 16:36-40; 26:8-10. The lust for power, the ambition for greatness ruined a richly gifted man, Jude 11. It did then. It will now, Hebrews 13:17.

Thank You, God, for those who lead. I reject the spirit of Korah. May I seek peace in the community of faith. Help me serve happily where You put me. In Jesus name, Amen.
November 2

“He is as greedy as the grave,” Habakkuk 2:5.

History chronicles nations afflicting nations, people hurting people. Every generation can recount stories of abuse. There is no end to the blame. Grudges develop. Anger increases. Hate takes over. The push and shove of violence erupts into a mad merry-go-round of tyranny. “A cruel man brings trouble on himself,” Proverbs 11:17. The retaliation of the mistreated heightens the level of violence. Hurt is heaped upon hurt. Injury is repaid with injury. “An eye for an eye” leaves the vengeful blind with unresolved rage.

• **Way of man.** What goes around comes around. Those who hate are hated. Those who hurt are hurt, Genesis 9:6a. From the carnal point of view, that is inherent in the structure of society, Habakkuk 2:6b,7. From the spiritual point of view, it is the judgment of God, Habakkuk 2:16. The power of the plunderer is undermined by his insatiable appetite, Habakkuk 2:5. He who suffers deprivation clings to the hope that retribution will redeem his loses. The victim rises up to take back what belongs to him. No mercy is shown. Ethical considerations are waved aside. Vengeance releases bent up rancor in an uncontrolled flood of reprisal. The second outrage is as bad (or worse) than the first, cf. Genesis 34:1-31. Honor is kept. Innocence is lost.

• **Way of God.** Vengeance unleashes the demons of hate. It erodes the soul, destroys the conscience. Futility is its reward. God wants to put an end to such behavior. He will step in and take charge. “He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many people. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore,” Isaiah 2:4. Peace will come. Vengeance will disappear, Proverbs 24:29. The people of the earth will abandon their weapons and forgive their adversaries.

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil…. Do not take revenge…leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge: I will repay,’ says the Lord,” Romans 12:17-19; cf. Proverbs 20:22.

The domains of God and satan are very different. In the kingdom of the devil, interest is focused on power, wealth, and pleasure. In the kingdom of God, emphasis is centered on mercy, kindness, and grace. The former is built on bloodshed and crime, Habakkuk 2:12. The latter is maintained by divine justice, Psalms 45:6. The evil one enslaves his captives. God calls for volunteers. Under the adversary, men toil in vain, Habakkuk 2:13. Under the Lord, the saints labor in hope, Isaiah 65:22,23; cf. I Corinthians 15:58. Which kingdom should we choose? Which life do we want to live?

God of grace, Lord of mercy, You have shown me a better way. My mind leans toward getting even. My heart knows better. Let Your Spirit settle the matter. Please intervene. In Him, who turned the other cheek, Amen.
What an impressive scene. Jesus had just fed the five thousand, Mark 6:39-44. After the feast, the Lord told His disciples to go to the other side of the lake, Matthew 14:22. He dismissed the crowd and went to a nearby mountain to pray, Mark 6:45,46. A storm stirred the lake into a tempest. The disciples were caught in the raging water. Jesus saw them, Mark 6:48a. He went to rescue them. When the Lord approached—walking on the water—the disciples were terrified, Matthew 14:25,26. What should we learn from this drama?

• **Fear of danger.** After experiencing the power of God, circumstances can cause us to forget. Christians are often troubled like everyone else. They encounter fear in the very act of obeying God, I Corinthians 2:1-3. While locked in panic, the disciples were not aware that Jesus was watching over them. He put them in the path of the storm. It was His way of teaching them to trust Him, James 1:2-4. He was not unmoved by their plight, Mark 6:49b,50; cf. John 14:1. He may have seemed absent but He was not far away. When Jesus said, “Take courage...do not be afraid,” He meant it. These were not idle words. They were expressed to banish anxiety, to instill confidence, to inspire boldness, and to awaken hope. The Lord is always with His children, Psalms 23:4; 56:3,4.

• **Frailty of faith.** This story represents life. While separated from Christ, the disciples sank into weakness. When the waves lashed their tiny boat, they were gripped by despair. Why? Had they not seen Him turn a boy’s lunch into a banquet? Had they not witnessed the storm obey His command? Mark 4:35-41. How could they so easily forget? But they did! Their faith was fragile. In His presence, they were confident. In His absence, they fell apart. Jesus asked them to wear a blindfold. They wanted to walk by sight, II Corinthians 4:18a; 5:7. God had not abandoned them. They had abandoned God. The disciples “hardened” their hearts, Mark 6:51,52.

People are often a strange mixture. While they seem to respect Jesus, their hearts are stubborn, Mark 3:1-5, hardened against the truth, Mark 10:1-5. The word “harden” meant “to blind” or “to grow insensitive,” John 12:39,40; Romans 11:7,8. It is the state of mind—when persisted in—that alienates us from God, Ephesians 4:17-19.

He who has a hard heart has a brittle faith.

The slow wittedness of the disciples is alarming. Surely they knew better. Yet they did not do better. They had seen so much. They believed so little. It is hard to understand the shallowness of their trust (until we look at our own). They did not grasp the meaning of the loaves, Mark 8:14-21. Do we? Are we not slow to believe? God is calling us to venture forth in faith, to live in the reality of His sovereignty, Jeremiah 5:21-24.

*You, O God, are the Lord of the tempest, the Master of the storm. When my little boat is caught in the waves, I want to remember the five loaves. I refuse to close my mind, to harden my heart. Through Christ Jesus, who watches over me, Amen.*
The army of David was in a trouble. The soldiers were surrounded, II Samuel 10:9a. Defeat seemed imminent. Death stared them in the face. There were only two options: surrender or fight. Joab chose the latter, II Samuel 10:9b-11. If we reviewed the life of Joab, we would likely conclude he was a rascal. Despite his failings, however, he issued some sound advice, II Samuel 10:12.

- **Rely on self.** The people of God were urged to fight. They were to show themselves ready. The way of righteousness was under siege. Hence, the troops were rallied, Psalms 94:16. Likewise, the cause of Christ calls for valiant action, Ephesians 6:10-12. The devil must be resisted, James 4:7; I Peter 5:8,9. Truth is under constant attack. Those who know God will bravely enter the fray, Daniel 11:32. The victory will go to the strong, I Corinthians 16:13. Joab won many battles. So did Alexander the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte, and George Washington. Yet the saints, who resist the world, are greater heroes than all these military commanders combined.

- **Lean on others.** An army must work together. The Church consists of many members. They must lean on each other, I Corinthians 10:24; Philippians 2:4. We do not hinder success by preparing for failures. Brethren should strengthen one another, Luke 22:31,32. We are all part of the same conflict. Therefore, we help each other, Isaiah 41:5,6. Our failure to do so is our doom, Numbers 32:23. The forces of Joab leaned on each other, II Samuel 10:11. Dare we do less? Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.

- **Depend on God.** It is appropriate to be strong. It is right to lean on one another. But neither of these will guarantee the ultimate victory, Ecclesiastes 9:11. We cannot command success in the battles of life. Joab understood that. He knew the outcome rested squarely on the shoulders of God, II Samuel 10:12. In the end, when all is said and done, the battle belongs to the Lord, I Samuel 17:47. Therefore, we should turn to Him who alone can save, I Chronicles 14:11; Jeremiah 39:18.


Joab knew the battle depended upon the providence of God. Or, to say it differently, the root of real courage is faith in the Lord. It is readiness to cooperate with God, Romans 8:31. It is belief in His power to strengthen the weak and overthrow the strong, II Kings 6:16. It is the certainty that God will help His followers. As the psalmist wrote, “The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid,” Psalms 118:6. He may let us suffer a temporary setback. He may stand aside so that we can see our inadequacy, II Chronicles 32:31b. Nevertheless, be assured, He knows what is best for us, Judges 10:15; I Samuel 3:18; II Samuel 15:26. Should that not be our watchword? We must fight bravely because the Lord will do what is good in His sight!

*Lord, commander of the angelic hosts, You know what is best for me. Let Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Through Him, who submitted to You, Amen.*
November 5

“Savage wolves will come in among you,” Acts 20:29.

The apostle Paul plead with Church leaders to shepherd their flock, Acts 20:28. For, wherever there are sheep, there are wolves! Without a shepherd, the wolves will scatter and devour the sheep, Ezekiel 34:5. The saints must be alert, watch out, and stand guard, Matthew 7:15.

“Wolves” are predators. They are ravenous beasts that devour their prey, Genesis 49:27; Jeremiah 5:6. They are “savage” animals that do not spare their victims, Acts 20:29; cf. Zephaniah 3:3. The world is crawling with these Church destroyers.


• **His example.** The apostle spoke to his trusted comrades—the elders of the Church, Acts 20:17. He reminded them of his words and actions. “You know how I lived,” he said, Acts 20:18. The elders had seen his humility. They had witnessed his tears. They had heard the frankness of his preaching. They had experienced the clarity of his message. He was without a doubt the real deal, Acts 20:19-21; cf. I Corinthians 15:32a. Paul encountered difficulty. He persevered until everyone in the area heard about Jesus, Acts 19:8-10. The apostle supported himself. He supplied his own needs, Act 20:33,34. He left an example of hard work, II Corinthians 12:14; I Thessalonians 2:5-9.

• **His apprehension.** The apostle was concerned. His heart was heavy. He knew the Church would suffer injury. It would be torn apart by false teachers, laid waste by sinful men, Acts 20:29,30. The prospects were grim, I Timothy 4:1,2. Paul knew that unless the elders cared for the flock the sheep were doomed, John 10:11-13. Paul had a painful foreboding. Would his work come to nothing? Would the precious souls in Ephesus be lost in the confusion of Church squabbles—bickering among the brethren? It was certain that the dark shadows of disaster were coming. Jesus warned of the impending danger, Matthew 24:24,25. Paul did, too, Acts 20:31.

• **His charge.** Paul was on his last missionary journey. He had proclaimed “the whole will of God,” Acts 20:27. His ministry was not general but specific, not partial but complete, Acts 20:24. He had discharged his duty, given them what they needed. He was “innocent of the blood of all men,” Acts 20:26. His final words were sobering. “I commit you to God,” he said, Acts 20:32. The Lord could turn his feeble effort into an unstoppable community of faith. He left the Church in the care of the Good Shepherd, John 10:14,15. With prayers and tears, Paul departed, Acts 20:36,37.

The apostle saw the wolves coming. He was neither a pessimist nor an optimist. He was a realist. He had a sharp eye on the future. He read the sign of the times. The wolves must be taken seriously. Danger was coming. It was a time for vigilance, Acts 20:31a.

Father, have mercy on Your lamb. I am no match against the wolves. Shield me. Wall me in with Your grace. In the arms of the Good Shepherd, Amen.
November 6


Israel was camped at Mount Sinai. They had received instructions from God, Acts 7:38. Their trek to the Promised Land was about to begin. None of them had ever been there. It was certain they would encounter numerous challenges along the way. God was with them, Genesis 48:15,16a; Exodus 14:19,20. He would take care of them. He knew the way. Israel should follow Him, Exodus 23:20. They should do what He asked them to do.

Their journey was much like our journey. Their situation speaks volumes to our situation, Isaiah 63:9. God always anticipates the future. He remains by our side through thick and thin, Exodus 33:14.

- The promise. Moses was called to lead Israel, Exodus 3:7-10. He was a good man. But he was a mere mortal—lower than the heavenly beings, Psalms 8:5. God dispatched an angel to lead His people through the wilderness, Exodus 23:23; 33:1-3. The angel would be like a “hornet” moving enemies out of their way, Exodus 23:28. No theory would explain the superhuman events of the forty year journey except a superhuman guide. The name of God was in the angel, Exodus 23:21. In other words, Jehovah revealed Himself through this angelic being. The angel was called “the Presence” of God, Exodus 33:15. This deputy from heaven was like the Lord. He saw things from the vista of eternity. He was qualified to guide through the maze of time.

- The stipulation. The angel knew the way. Israel could not get lost. They would not suffer harm along the path, Exodus 23:25,26. That much was certain. God had promised on oath to deliver Israel safely “to the land flowing with milk and honey.” The angel would do his part. But would Israel do their part? The promise was conditional. They would get to Canaan if they listened to the angel, Exodus 23:22. The promise was there for the taking, Exodus 23:31. Assistance against failure was contingent on accepting help. So, to those who persist in seeking glory, honor, and immorality, “He will give eternal life,” Romans 2:7. God requires His people to play by the rules, 1 Corinthians 9:24. He expects us to follow His example, Hebrews 12:1-3.

Seldom does He lead in obvious paths when He works His greatest miracles.

The arrangements were set. He sent His angel. He showed the way. But God demanded faithfulness in His followers, Exodus 34:5-7. Why was sin not condoned—waived aside as inevitable human weakness? The Lord took sin seriously. So must we, Romans 1:18. God does not allow excuses. He does not overlook evil, Romans 2:8-10. “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sin is left, Hebrews 10:26. Alibis are rejected. Pretensions are dismissed. Only good and faithful servants will share in the happiness of heaven, Matthew 25:21.

Kind Father, You are my guide. Your directions are clear. The Promised Land is just ahead. What a joy it will be to share Your happiness. In Christ Jesus, Amen.
“Groan before them with broken heart and bitter grief,” Ezekiel 21:6.

War is an insane game. It is the business of barbarians. War is killing sanctioned by the law. It is organized cruelty camouflaged by the call to heroism, decorated by the ornaments of patriotism, Psalms 120:6,7. Warfare is often championed as good. For, it is said, war increases employment and makes boys into men. It offers career opportunities and exotic travel. But these so called “virtues” pale in light of the atrocities inflicted on the innocent.

- **Human calamity.** War is a fearful thing. As the troops advance, as the battle lines are drawn, terror multiplies, panic takes over, Ezekiel 21:7. The righteous and the wicked suffer, Ezekiel 21:4. The sword is no respecter of persons. War destroys. Whatever is gained in booty is lost in brokenness. War is not a pageant of drums and flags, of trumpets and banners. It is an inferno of agony and despair, a cauldron of suffering and death, Ezekiel 21:31,32. Thousands are wounded. Hundreds are cut down in the flower of their youth. Marriages are torn apart. Children are separated from parents. Every casualty creates a household of bitterness and mourning, Ezekiel 21:14-17. War unleashes the lowest passions of men. Hatred and revenge take center stage. Humans become monsters. The vilest of outrages are committed. May the Lord “scatter the nations who delight in war,” Psalms 68:30; 140:1,2.

- **Divine judgment.** Government misconduct results in the chastisement of God. A bad national policy brings misery to a people. It may come sooner. It may delay till later. But it will come, Isaiah 1:4-6,18-20. God will not tolerate the insolent and unrighteous dealings of a country, Jeremiah 18:7-10. National sin necessitates national judgment. Wrath is stored up for the day of wrath, Romans 2:5. The most terrible, yet the most common, form of judgment is war, Ezekiel 21:8-12. The sin of a country sharpens the sword, but the hand of God directs it, Habakkuk 2:9-13. It is a fearful thing to realize that the Lord can bring such dire destruction on a wayward nation. Nevertheless, the God of battle is also the God of blessing. He who sends the scourge of war also sends the Gospel of peace.

War is never a blessing.

Ezekiel was told to mourn, Ezekiel 21:6. He was to “sigh” or “gasp” in tears for those who suffer the brutality of military conflict, Lamentations 1:4,11,21. Such anguish raises a tough question. How can God be a partner in pain? He rules the world, Psalms 22:28. His universal reign is based on righteousness, Psalms 27:1-3. He destroys nations physically only when they have already destroyed themselves spiritually, Genesis 15:16; Psalms 9:17; Proverbs 14:34. “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Genesis 18:25.

*I do not pretend to understand Your sovereign rule. But I believe. I do not grasp Your ways in war. But You know best. Rule over the nations. Do what You must do to stymie the advance of evil. In Christ, the Lord of armies, Amen.*
November 8

“Where can wisdom be found?” Job 28:12.

The achievements of mankind are truly amazing. Progress in all directions seems endless. New gadgets are invented daily. Year after year man has done more, gone further, and reached higher. Yet, in understanding, people are, for the most part, clueless.

- **Beyond human reach.** In the ancient world, mining was an incredible skill. Men learned to find gold and silver, to smelt iron and copper, Job 28:1,2. Miners worked in the bowels of the earth, Job 28:4. They pursued their quest in places unseen by and inaccessible to both birds and animals, Job 28:7-11. In spite of all these advances, their grasp of ultimate knowledge remained quite elementary, Job 28:12.

- **Beyond purchase price.** The human family cannot comprehend the worth of wisdom. They do not have any idea where it might be found, Job 28:13. The miner’s gold and the merchant’s rubies cannot purchase wisdom, Proverbs 8:10,11. What God does and what God knows is a complete mystery to man, Job 5:9; 11:7,8; Psalms 139:6; Ecclesiastes 8:16,17; Isaiah 40:28; Romans 11:33.

We are adrift in a sea of ignorance. What should humankind do? We cannot make sense of the world. We are unable to understand God. There is nowhere to turn, no one from whom we can gain insight. With a troubled mind, we plod along. But the problem does not disappear. Bewildered and exhausted, we keep looking, hoping to find wisdom.

- **Possessed by God.** If man cannot buy wisdom, if he cannot discover it, his choices are limited, Job 28:20. The world is full of secrets, Job 28:21. The grave has no answers, Job 28:22. God is the sole proprietor of real knowledge, Job 28:23,24; cf. Job 12:13a. The Lord has studied wisdom. He has pondered it, measured it, and certified it, Job 28:27. Man is stumped. Our mind is too small for such matters.

- **Revealed to man.** Jehovah has spoken, Job 28:28. The dilemma is solved. The fear of the Lord is wisdom. This is not a slavish dread but a reverent respect. It is the mainspring of piety, Deuteronomy 5:29; 10:12. It is the source of all genuine understanding, Proverbs 9:10. The soul that reveres God will find its greatest joy in studying His word and doing His will, Proverbs 14:2,16; II Corinthians 7:1.

The fool thinks he is wise. The wise know he is a fool.

The skills and accomplishments of men are admirable. Yet the cleverness and ingenuity of humans must not be worshipped. They have no eternal value. Authentic knowledge is found in the worship of God, Job 11:13-20. That is real wisdom.

*Human insights can easily blind my eyes. I know very little. But You, O Lord, are wise. Understanding abides in an awe of Your name. Thanks for making this known. Through Jesus, my wisdom, Amen.*
November 9

“Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,” Hebrews 12:1.

Christians can confidently approach God, Ephesians 3:12. Jesus opened the way to the celestial throne room, Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19-22. The door is unlocked. The lights are on. The welcome mat is out. The barrier which formerly stymied our approach to God has been removed, Hebrews 7:18,19.

- **The race.** The way to heaven is like a foot race, Acts 20:24; I Corinthians 9:24; II Timothy 4:7,8. The life of faith is not a stroll in the park but an arduous effort to the finish, Hebrews 12:1. It requires our full attention, I Peter 4:18. The victory is won by a steady persistence, a perseverance to the end, Hebrews 10:35,36. A huge crowd of spectators—those who have already completed the race—cheer us on to victory. They know it can be done. Their example renews our hope, invigorates our energy. So we press on, Philippians 3:12-14.

- **The preparation.** In biblical times, an athlete had to “lay aside” bulky robes that impeded his effort, Hebrews 12:1. Every obstruction and interference had to go. The race must be taken seriously. Many things can “easily entangle.” Old associations, lingering desires, bad habits, and besetting practices must be thrown away, I Timothy 4:15,16. The runner has to be single minded, dedicated to the race. There is no room for indifference, half-heartedness, and distraction. The race is short. The finish line is just ahead. There is only one chance to win the prize, Hebrews 6:11,12.

- **The encouragement.** Runners become weary. They are tempted to quite. Voices of despair beg us to drop out of the race, to surrender the pursuit, to cease the chase. But we are urged to “consider” Jesus, Hebrews 12:2. It is not a time to “grow weary,” Galatians 6:9; Hebrews 12:3. He knows all about the struggle. He has been there and done that. Our momentary hardships should not be a surprise, Matthew 10:25; John 15:20. He can help us get through them, Psalms 25:15. If we endure like Him, we will wear a crown like His, Revelation 2:10.

“He that stands firm to the end will be saved,” Matthew 24:13.

The key is endurance. It is hanging in and holding on when the going gets tough. We are not given wings to fly over our troubles. We are given knees to prayer our way through them, II Corinthians 12:9,10. Obstacles must not daunt us. Delays must not depress us. For, “if we endure, we will reign with Him,” II Timothy 2:12. Our hardships are the training needed to endure the race, Hebrews 12:7. We will win if we keep running.

*Father in heaven, You have pointed the way, provided the strength, and promised the crown. I am straining, lunging, and stretching toward the finish line. Through Jesus, who helps me every step of the way, Amen.*
“Freely you have received, freely give,” Matthew 10:8.

Jesus was sending out the twelve apostles, Matthew 10:5a. It was one of their first preaching trips. He empowered them to work miracles, Matthew 10:1. He limited their mission, Matthew 10:5b. He also limited their message, Matthew 10:7.

It was far better—considering their stage of understanding—to confine their activity. The apostles focused on deeds of mercy rather than intricate expositions of the kingdom, Matthew 10:8. Hidden within the instructions of Christ was a priceless nugget of advice. The blessings of the kingdom were free to everyone. They were to be dispensed “without money and without cost,” Isaiah 55:1-3. “Freely you have received,” the Lord said, “freely give.” Thus, in the future, that became the modus operandi of the apostles, Acts 3:1-6.

• Freely receive. Some of the instructions of Jesus were restricted to the first century. Other parts of His directions apply to the here and now. His “freely receive, freely give” principle is the rule for ministry for all time. It is what God was doing, Romans 3:21-24; Revelation 21:6; 22:17. It was what the apostles were supposed to do, II Corinthians 11:7; II Thessalonians 3:7,8. We are to be monuments of grace, dispensers of mercy. Since we were saved by the free gift of divine goodness, we should help others “without expecting to get anything back,” Luke 6:35,36. The apostles refused to associate their acts of grace with payments of money, Acts 8:18-21. We are to do the same. Though one may make a living by preaching, I Corinthians 9:13,14, he should find his true joy in seeking no reward, Matthew 6:1-4.

• Freely give. Everything we have is a gift from above, John 3:27; I Corinthians 4:7. Since, then, we freely receive, we ought to freely give. It authenticates our ministry. It keeps the focus on God rather than on self, II Kings 5:15,16,20,21,26,27. Jewish rabbis were forbidden to take money for their teaching. Rabbi Zadok said, “do not use the law to aggrandize yourself.” And Hillel, a Jewish scholar, wrote, “whoever desires a benefit for himself will destroy himself.” We must not “covet anyone’s silver and gold,” Acts 20:33-35. It hinders the Gospel to make merchandize of His grace, I Corinthians 9:12; II Corinthians 6:3; 11:7-11.

“Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit,” II Corinthians 2:17.

Christ is the free gift of God, John 1:16,17. He is the love offering of heaven, John 3:16. Circumstances did not conspire to bring Him. He came on His own. He is the unfathomable, indescribable gift of God, II Corinthians 9:15. We are the benefactors of His kindness. Freely we have received. Freely we should give.

Lord, Your grace shines brightly. My actions must not dim its radiance. I will freely give so that the world can see Your wonderful goodness. Through Jesus, the gift of God, Amen.
“On whom are you depending?” II Kings 18:20.

Hezekiah was in a bind. The enemy was close at hand—a mere forty miles away, II Kings 18:9,10. Judah faced imminent peril. What was she to do? To resist the mightiest military power in the world seemed utterly futile. And an alliance with Egypt would be equally as “useless,” Isaiah 30:1-5.

The king vacillated. In spite of the advice of Isaiah, he made a pact with his neighbor. God called it “a covenant with death, an agreement with the grave” Isaiah 28:18,19. It was a major blunder. The treaty with Egypt was first rate folly, Isaiah 28:20.

Hezekiah continued to stumble. He tried to negotiate with the Assyrians. He thought he could buy his way out of trouble. The king paid a huge price, II Kings 18:13-15. He was as successful as appeasing an angry alligator. A few days later the Assyrians demanded unconditional surrender. Their tactics were similar to those of the devil.

Give the devil your ear and he will take your soul.

- **He fakes his importance.** Assyria belittled Hezekiah, II Kings 18:20. The contract with Egypt was held up as a joke, II Kings 18:21. Hezekiah was embarrassed. The evil one likes to do that. He puts us on the defensive. When we are caught off balance, he delivers the final blow. His knockout punch was his claim of being commissioned by God, II Kings 18:25. Evil masks its real identity. Satan is a blasphemer, II Kings 19:5,6. God called the devil’s bluff, II Kings 19:22. His pretense was exposed.

- **He ridicules our faith.** The tempter has many tricks. If we see through his fakery, he will attack our trust in God. He will make light of our faith in the Lord, II Kings 18:29,30. The king of Assyria is a case in point, II Kings 18:32b-35. Anyone could recognize the power of his argument, II Kings 19:10,11. He had demolished every fortress in his path. Jerusalem was next (or so the Assyrians assumed). Our arch enemy—satan—makes many assumptions. Where God says, “Do not,” he says, “Go ahead.” Was that not his strategy with Adam and Eve? We must keep the faith. Hezekiah did, II Kings 18:5-7.

- **He makes false promises.** Assyria was irate. How dare Judah challenge their invincible power? She did because the strength of God was greater, II Kings 19:15-18. Assyria made false promises, II Kings 18:31,32a. The words of the adversary were empty—as reliable as a bubble in the breeze. Sin is always like that. It is a pleasant promise that leads to a grim destiny, Proverbs 1:10; cf. Deuteronomy 13:6-8. The people in Jerusalem stood their ground, II Kings 18:36. It is futile arguing with the father of lies.

> Sovereign Master, my danger is real. Satan has his ways. He flatters himself, belittles my faith, and makes fraudulent promises. I trust You to deal with him. Thank You. Because of Christ, on whom I depend, Amen.
November 12

“His word is in my heart like a fire,” Jeremiah 20:9.

Fire was often a symbol for the presence of God. The Lord appeared as “a smoking firepot with a blazing torch” when He made a covenant with Abraham, Genesis 15:17,18. He confronted Moses in the “burning bush,” Exodus 3:2. Jehovah lead Israel through the wilderness by “a pillar of fire,” Exodus 13:21,22. The presence of Jesus caused a burning in the hearts of those on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24:32. When the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles, there were “tongues of fire” above their heads, Acts 2:1-4.

Jeremiah was tempted to withdraw from his ministry. He was disheartened. The people rejected his words, belittled his message, Jeremiah 20:1,2. The persecution was relentless, Jeremiah 26:8,9. The prophet sank into despair, Jeremiah 20:7,8. His friends were eager to betray him, Jeremiah 20:10. Jeremiah tried to quit but found it impossible, Jeremiah 20:9. The prophet “got his second wind.” He moved ahead confident that God would help him prevail, Jeremiah 20:11.

- **Powerful influence.** Jeremiah was not merely blessed with new insight into truth. He was overcome by the power of it. He was not at liberty to do as he pleased—to suppress it, to utter it at his convenience, Jeremiah 6:10,11a. The word of the Lord was his master, a burning fire in his heart. He did not hold the truth. The truth held him, cf. Numbers 24:1,2,10-13. God was present. How could the prophet hide the truth when he was made trustee of the message? II Corinthians 3:4-6.

- **Painful effect.** No one with selfish ambition should desire to be a spokesman for God, Jeremiah 23:25,26. The high privilege of delivering His message carries dire consequences—disappointment, rejection, and mistreatment, Jeremiah 23:29. The Lord denounces charlatans, Jeremiah 23:30-32. He leads His faithful messengers through Gethsemane. His touch energizes the soul and quickens the mind. It puts fire in the bones. The believer cannot remain silent, Psalms 39:1-3.

God cannot speak through us until He gets inside us.

It is common for the servants of the Most High to falter. Moses did, Exodus 5:22,23; Numbers 11:10-15. Elijah did, too, I Kings 19:1-4. Such is the stress in doing the will of God among sinful men. While in Gethsemane “the spirit is willing but the body is weak,” Matthew 26:41. Jeremiah had his moments. We do, too. But, when the word of God dwells in us, we will experience that fire. We will be compelled to speak, Job 32:18; Isaiah 62:1; Amos 3:8; Acts 4:20. The prophet felt the heat. He overcome his fear. Every inclination to relinquish his work vanished. He was motivated by the call of God and the constraint of conscience, I Corinthians 9:16,17. And so should we.

*God in heaven, Lord on earth, Your spirit is restless in me. When I try to be silent, You urge me to speak. When I want to retreat, You coax me to advance. I feel the fire. I sense the necessity. Thanks for Your holy nudge. In His name, Amen.*
“(God said), ‘Here I am, here I am,’” Isaiah 65:1.

Israel was in captivity. She had forsaken Jehovah. The exile was a fair punishment for her sins. She had forgotten the Lord. Yet the Lord had not forgotten her. Her worship ceased, Hosea 2:11. Her land lay in ruins, Hosea 2:12, 13. Such is the story of history. The human family is slow to learn. We enjoy our blessings but ignore the One who blesses. We turn our back on the Lord. We snub the Judge of judges. Then we act surprised that there are consequences. It is time to listen to Isaiah.

• **Availability of God.** In spite of human folly, God “revealed” Himself to those “who did not ask.” He was “found” by those “who did not seek” Him, Isaiah 65:1. When Israel failed to call on God, God called on her, Isaiah 43:20-23. “Here am I, here am I,” He said. God was available. He “stretched out” His hands begging her to return to Him, Proverbs 1:22-27. The Lord seeks us more than we seek Him. “All day long” He pleads, Isaiah 65:2. All day long we turn away. We are a contrary bunch of ingrates.

• **Stubbornness of man.** The prophet described Israel as “an obstinate people.” In spite of the encouragement of heaven, they pursued “their own imaginations.” Their minds were carnal—given over to their fleshly nature, Romans 8:5-8. They bluntly disregarded the instructions of God, Isaiah 65:3, 4. Israel “provoked” the Lord to His “face.” They incurred ceremonial pollution by eating the flesh of pigs. They even assumed a superior attitude, Isaiah 65:5. How can people go so far wrong?

• **Anger of heaven.** Enough was enough. Jehovah turned away from Israel since Israel turned away from Jehovah, Deuteronomy 32:18-22. His people had offended Him. They were as irritating as camp fire smoke, Proverbs 10:26. Their offenses were recorded in His memory book, Isaiah 65:6, 7a. The allusion is to the custom of kings writing decrees on a scroll. The scroll was kept near the royal throne as a reminder, cf. Psalms 56:8; Malachi 3:16. God remembered the offenses of Israel. Justice was served.

• **Glimmer of hope.** In the midst of the disaster, which Israel brought on herself, there was a ray of hope. The majority in Israel were evil but there was still some good in her, Isaiah 65:8. The divine eye could see the wheat among the chaff. A remnant would return from captivity, Isaiah 10:20, 21. He cherished the few who stayed faithful even though they lived among the faithless, Isaiah 65:9. God will save those who seek Him.

The Lord wants us to come to Him far more than we want to go to Him.

We have two choices. We can ignore Him and confront His wrath, Isaiah 64:5-7. Or we can acknowledge Him and find His mercy, Isaiah 64:8, 9. The outcome lies in the future. The decision is now. The righteous will choose salvation, Isaiah 55:6, 7.

*I know what You want me to do, Father. I am grateful for Your word. I have no desire to dilly dally with Your will. Save me. Through Christ, my Lord, Amen.*

Peter was impulsive. He often acted without careful thought. It was his trademark. When Jesus predicted that His disciples would forsake Him, it was Peter who reacted first. “I never will,” he said, Matthew 26:31-35. In less than twelve hours, he did, Matthew 26:69-74. Such is the habit of an impetuous person.

Peter often failed. The Lord insisted on thoughtful planning, Luke 14:28-30. A significant amount of failure is due to leaping before looking, acting on an emotional impulse without counting the cost.

A classic case of impulsive behavior was walking on the water. Peter did not wait. Instead of letting Jesus come to him, this act-first, think-later disciple wanted to go to the Lord, Matthew 14:25-29. He over estimated his faith. He under estimated the danger, Matthew 14:30. Peter had courage. But he also had doubt, Matthew 14:31. What caused him to doubt?

- **Intellectual reasons.** When life raises questions that have no answers, doubt is at the door. Why do accidents happen? Why do the innocent suffer? Why must people die? Without answers, our faith wrestles with doubt, Mark 9:17-24. Only God can walk on water, Job 9:8. Only God can feed five thousand with a “happy meal.” Why was Peter confused? Why did he think Jesus was a ghost? Matthew 14:25,26. We seem to recognize wonders in the past quicker than miracles in the present.

- **Spiritual reasons.** Doubt is the result of misplaced trust. When faith is focused on self, the challenges of life will soon overwhelm. When faith rests on others, we are quickly disappointed. When faith is in Jesus, we are saved. To have faith is good. To have faith in the Son of God is by far the best, Matthew 14:32,33. The storm created doubt. The Lord gave hope. Peter walked on the water as long as he kept his eyes on Christ. When he saw the wind, he sank. When we look at ourselves, we immediately realize there is no way we can make it to heaven on our own, Proverbs 3:5-7; Jeremiah 10:23.

Doubt means “to waver.” Those who waver are “double-minded.” They are “unstable” in all they do, James 1:5-8. The cure for such wavering is complete trust. It is being “fully persuaded” that God has the power to do what He promises, Romans 4:18-21. When we commit ourselves to Him without reservation as the ultimate reality, our doubt diminishes, Psalms 112:4.

Doubt does nothing.
It undoes everything.

Father, You are my anchor. Your miracles are my assurance. What You did You can still do. Your power is my hope. I shall trust in no one (and in nothing) else. Through Him who walks on water, Amen.
“The king's business was urgent,” I Samuel 21:8.

David was in mortal danger, I Samuel 20:30,31. The future king fled to Nob—a few miles north of Jerusalem. He went there to get assistance for his escape—food, a weapon, and guidance from God, I Samuel 22:10.

David was alone, I Samuel 21:1. His explanation for traveling solo was a pretense, Samuel 21:2. He was not running an errand for Saul. He was running away from Saul. David lied. He told a tale to disguise the truth. Certainly lies—even little lies—disguise the truth temporarily. God was not pleased, Proverbs 12:22.

This story shows how easy it is to blend good and evil. It demonstrates how a man of God can distort the truth to save himself. It reveals how small missteps explode into huge mistakes. It shows the damage done by innocent deception.

Dare to be honest—nothing is improved by a lie.
A fault that needs a cover grows into two thereby!

- **Reasons for his lie.** David was exhausted. He was hungry, I Samuel 21:3. His immediate need obscured his long-term goal, Deuteronomy 8:2,3. Likewise, Esau was short-sighted, overcome by a temporary obsession, Genesis 25:29-33. Quick gratification can cause immoral behavior, godless conduct, Hebrews 12:16,17. In a desperate situation, we are prone to rely on human schemes instead of divine grace, Matthew 6:25-34. David was too worried. In his weakness, he depended on himself. His lie to man replaced his trust in God.

- **Results of his lie.** No voice from heaven told him to fabricate a falsehood. No light from above lead him to fib. He may have thought he did the best he could under the circumstances. He may have been sincere in his intentions. But he lied. His lie reached the ears of Saul, I Samuel 22:9-10. Saul became angry, I Samuel 22:11-13. Innocent people were slaughtered, I Samuel 22:18,19. David took responsibility, I Samuel 22:20-22. Yet it was too late. The deed was done. The harm was irreversible. The tongue of David became a lethal instrument “set on fire by hell,” James 3:5-8.

The intention to deceive is the essence of lying. It is a violation of the bond which glues society together. It is a sin against the love we owe to one another, Ephesians 4:25. It cuts like a sharp razor, Psalms 52:2. It is contrary to the will of heaven, Leviticus 19:11; cf. Psalms 34:12,13; Colossians 3:9,10. Lying is contempt for God and hatred of man. We cannot sow evil deeds and harvest good fruit, Galatians 6:7,8. The careless use of the tongue will catch up with us sooner or later, Ecclesiastes 12:14. Beware. Be warned. Be careful. The tongue resides in a slippery place.

*Kind Father, I call them “lies of necessity.” You call them “sin.” I must recognize the difference, abandon my alibis, and be honest. In Him, who is the Truth, Amen.*
November 16

“We are more than conquerors,” Romans 8:37.

Believers live in a paradise of assurance, Romans 8:28. In spite of overwhelming odds, the saints are victorious. “Thanks be to God!” the apostle Paul wrote. “He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,” I Corinthians 15:57.

- **We are conquerors.** An indomitable spirit resides in every nook and cranny on earth. A delicate flower blooms high on a precarious mountain cliff. A little bug clings to life in the pitiless heat of an arid desert. A beleaguered sufferer rises above the grinding agony of his circumstances. This is God’s world. There are victories everywhere, I John 5:4,5; cf. John 16:33. Gallantry flourishes in the most unlikely places—the hovel in a slum, the cell in a prison, the room in a hospital. It is a significant victory to be a conqueror in the arena of daily life, I John 2:14.

- **More than conquerors.** We not only defeat the powers of evil but also snatch a blessing from the valley of tears, James 1:12; cf. Matthew 5:11; I Peter 3:14a; 4:14. Perseverance interprets the pain that the thrill of victory leaves unexplained, James 5:11. The challenges which threaten our joy become the source of our deepest understanding. These trials are not merely overcome. They are rendered harmless, changed into something good, I Peter 1:3-7. Among the dark clouds, we discover the silver lining.

- **Through Him who loved us.** Calvary is the center piece of God’s love, Romans 5:8; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:1,2; Revelation 1:5b,6. Though we do not see Him, we still stand in awe of His great sacrifice. For it is through His death that we live. It is through His sorrow that we are filled with joy, I Peter 1:8,9. The power which robs misfortune of its sting is the energy of divine love. This is not a complete answer to the problem of suffering but it is the working philosophy of a believer. We possess the required resources to finish the race, to win the crown, Revelation 21:5-7.

  The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it!

For some people, it is rash presumption to be sure of our destiny. Paul disagreed. He was a man of sound judgment. He did not think it was irrational to be confident in his faith, Romans 8:31,32. Christ was the difference. Adversaries may falsely accuse. Skeptics may hatefully condemn. But God saves, Romans 8:33,34.

Heaven is aware of our trials and tribulations. Hence, there is nothing on earth that can successfully steal us from the embrace of God, John 10:28,29. His umbrella of protection is over us at all times, John 17:14,15. We are more than conquerors, Romans 8:35-37. Paul was convinced. Our safe arrival in heaven is guaranteed, Romans 8:38,39.

Thank you, Lord, for Your assurance. It steadies my steps. It reinforces my resolve. I rejoice today because I know where I will be tomorrow. Through Him, who loves me, Amen.
November 17


Jerusalem was in ruins. The temple was a heap of rubble. Many of the people languished in exile. Jeremiah insisted that God was responsible, Lamentations 2:8,9. The Lord had been their Shepherd. Now He was their tormenter, Psalms 13:1-4.


Whenever a saint goes through trying times, he can easily feel betrayed. He grapples with physical suffering, emotional stress, and spiritual confusion. Is God really responsible? And, if He is, how can we understand His love?

Jeremiah was keenly aware of his situation, Lamentations 3:19,20. He stood on the brink of despair. Yet, before he leaped into the abyss of disbelief, he remembered the goodness of God, Lamentation 3:21-23; cf. Psalms 42:3-5.

- **His compassions never fail.** Humans have no claim on divine kindness. His mercies are not deserved. Therefore, if they are withheld, we have no right to complain. We have done much to provoke His wrath. His compassions may seem hidden. They are not always visible. Like the moon that waxes and wanes, so His grace can appear to come and go. In reality, however, it remains the same, Psalms 86:14,15. The discipline of God is His compassion disguised in pain, Hebrews 12:10,11.

- **They are new every morning.** God adapts His grace to the needs of each day. His mercies are never stale. Like fresh-baked bread, they are new each day. We need not exhume the stories of past mercy. His kindness is constantly updated, Zephaniah 3:5. It is refreshed daily, Psalms 5:3. We can awaken every morning with the happy prospect of new mercies waiting to be discovered and enjoyed.

> When we see His compassion, we are lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Jeremiah had his moment of weakness. In the middle of his agony, he blamed God for his pain. But, in the end, he saw the light. The prophet regrouped and moved ahead in faith, Lamentations 3:24. The Lord became his source of hope, Lamentations 3:25,26.

We are to “wait for the Lord.” The saints should eagerly anticipate the fulfillment of His purposes. This is our strength, Isaiah 40:29-31. Waiting is the cheerful knowledge that God really loves us, Lamentations 3:31-33. He always cares, Matthew 10:29-31.

> Though I sigh under the rigors of sorrow, I know You are gracious. My faith may falter. But I shall not fall. Your mercies sustain me during times of weakness. Thank You. In Him, who comforts me, Amen.
“Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” Luke 13:23.

What was the motive behind such a question? Was the inquirer really wanting to learn? Was he simply trying to trick the Lord? It is very hard to tell from what little we know. It is certain, however, that the first century Jews believed God made this world for many people. But they believed the next world was made for only a few, cf. Matthew 7:13,14.

Jesus answered the man by avoiding the question. This was a common practice of the Lord, Luke 23:8,9; John 21:18-22. Christ entertained serious queries. He side stepped vain curiosity. Yet what He said on this occasion is worth careful scrutiny.

- **Door is narrow.** Luke 13:24. Houses in ancient times had a narrow door. A person with a bulky load could hardly wiggle through it. Consequently, Jesus said make “every effort” to enter. Literally He said to “agonize.” We run a risk. It is easy to think that—once we are a member of a Church—we can relax. Not so! The Christian life is like climbing a mountain. One cannot drift to the summit, Revelation 3:21.

- **Time is short.** Luke 13:25. The narrow door was shut at night. Delay was dangerous. Entry should be made before it was too late, Hebrews 4:1,2,6,11. Time will run out. Opportunity will cease. History will come to a close. How devastating to be left out, Matthew 25:1-13. The clock is ticking. Time is short. The judgment day will not be a time for presenting evidence. It will be the day of sentencing, Matthew 7:21-23.

- **Judgment is impartial.** Luke 13:26,27. There was no advantage in being a descendant of Abraham, Luke 3:7,8. There was no benefit in being a contemporary of Christ. Eating lunch with Him or being His student did not guarantee a home in heaven. Faith is the ticket. Baptism is the passport, Galatians 3:26-29. Human pedigree and personal experience did not open the pearly gates.

- **Surprise is likely.** Luke 13:28,29. Those who thought they were saved were left out. Human opinion was not the ultimate factor. God alone is the judge, James 4:12. He will make the final decision, Matthew 25:31-33. The judgment day will be a day of surprises. Those who thought they were in will be out. And those who were considered out will be in, Luke 18:10-14. The elect will not be determined by human prejudice, Luke 13:30.

“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall,” Proverbs 16:18.

The Jew thought he was saved. He believed everyone else was lost. In judging others, he condemned himself, Romans 2:1-3. God has no favorites, Romans 2:11. Let the presumptuous tremble. They stand on perilous ground, I Corinthians 10:12.

*God, I am vulnerable to smug self-approval. I easily think I am right and others wrong, I am saved and others lost. I have my hands full with concerns for my own salvation. Why, then, should I judge my neighbor? In Him, who will decide, Amen.*
To Babylon, the defeat of Judah was caused by the bankruptcy of her God. He seemed unable to protect His people. In a similar way, skeptics say Christianity has been tried and found wanting. Two world wars were started by those who worshipped Jesus.

How should a believer reply to such criticism? Two comments are offered. (1) The misfortunes of man are not the weakness of God. They are the justice of heaven. Do not humans reap what they sow? (2) Our knowledge of God is still incomplete. A full understanding of His actions can only be achieved over the long haul. Does a successful heart transplant appear as beneficial at mid-surgery as it does a month later?

- **Israel profaned His name.** The text of this devotional study ushers us into the secret courtroom of heaven. There the motives of God are revealed. He punished Israel because His people profaned His name, Ezekiel 36:16-21. God is honest. If He agrees to a covenant, He is honor-bound to keep its stipulations. God swore He would punish sin, Deuteronomy 31:19-21. What He promised to do, He faithfully did, Ezekiel 36:22,23. He poured out His fury. He demonstrated His displeasure. God was not impotent. He merely “judged them according to their actions,” Ezekiel 36:19. Israel felt deserted. She was no longer near to God. Her sin had separated her from the Lord, Isaiah 59:1,2.

  Israel had profaned the name of God, Leviticus 18:21; 19:12; 22:2.

- **God pitied His name.** The reputation of God was at stake—even among the pagans. Jehovah was concerned, Ezekiel 20:9. In human terms, He was distressed at the evil things which were said of Him among unbelievers. Israel had caused the problem. God was determined to fix it, Ezekiel 36:22. The Lord promised Israel she would be a blessing to the world, Genesis 22:15-18. He was not going to allow His intentions to be frustrated. He chose to redeem His people from captivity for His own sake, Ezekiel 36:24-32. God vindicated His name. He showed His greatness and His holiness among many nations, Ezekiel 38:23.

  The final outcome of this international saga validated the character of Jehovah. It took three centuries to unfold. His name was hallowed as never before, Ezekiel 39:21-29. Yet today He is again sadly misunderstood. His existence is denied by some. His actions are misjudged by others. But God is His own interpreter. He will reveal Himself as He really is. And one day we will see that “all His paths are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of His covenant,” Psalms 25:10,11.

  Sovereign Lord, You are who You say You are. And I am certain that, in the future, I shall completely understand what is troubling me now. I will patiently wait until my faith becomes perfect sight. In the name, that is above all names, Amen.
“Get yourself ready!” Jeremiah 1:17.

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet, Jeremiah 1:4,5. He hesitated, Jeremiah 1:6. After a bit of dialogue, the conversation ended, Jeremiah 1:7,8. The command was issued, Jeremiah 1:17. Jeremiah was ushered into the eye of the storm. The prophet faced immediate hostility, Jeremiah 7:27. There was no need to be discouraged. God was with Him, Jeremiah 1:18,19; 15:20,21. His success was not measured by the approval of his audience.

It was not easy for the prophet to stand before his countrymen, Jeremiah 20:10. They had quit listening to God. They were determined to go their own way, Jeremiah 1:16. Jeremiah was young. Yet, when God calls, He provides ample assistance for the task, Jeremiah 20:11; cf. Isaiah 43:1,2.

- **The assignment.** God literally asked Jeremiah “to gird up his loins.” This referred to tucking his long, flowing garment under his belt in preparation for strenuous activity, Exodus 12:11; I Kings 18:46; Acts 12:8; I Peter 1:13. (1) The assignment involved getting ready. The Lord is poorly served when the laborer is unprepared for his job. (2) The task involved saying “whatever” God commanded. The ambassador of heaven must not pick-and-choose from scripture what suits his fancy or tickles the ears of others, Jeremiah 15:19. Whether promise or threat, whether easy or difficult, the prophet was “to proclaim the whole will of God,” Acts 20:27.

- **The encouragement.** Jeremiah was to remain faithful. His assignment was very challenging. However, sufficient encouragement was offered. (1) His ministry was important. God was watching, Jeremiah 1:11,12. The prophet was not given unnecessary busy work. He had the truth that would set men free. His words were not private property but public domain. His message mattered, Jeremiah 26:2,3. (2) His ministry was also urgent. God was ready to act, Jeremiah 1:13,14. The prophet was the last resort. His faithful proclamation could spell the difference between life and death. If Jeremiah faltered, God would take matters into His own hands, Isaiah 63:1-5.

Preaching is a passion not a profession.

Like Jeremiah, as time passes, we face a growing dilemma. We speak of a coming judgment. Yet, after years of warning, there is no sign of the judgment. The mood of people is one of increasing denial, Jeremiah 17:15; cf. Isaiah 5:19; II Peter 3:3,4. Did Jeremiah waste his breath? Are we beating a dead horse? The only assurance of a coming judgment is the conviction that God has spoken. He will do what He plans to do according to His own calendar, II Peter 3:8,9. Contrary to all appearances, we are to stay the course. That is our assignment, II Timothy 4:1-5.

*Lord, my destiny is in Your hands. You are in control. Your words will come to pass. I am ready. Come what may, I will continue to warn others of the coming judgment. Through the name of Jesus, my Savior, Amen.*
Jesus predicted His disciples would betray Him. “You will all fall away,” Mark 14:27. Peter would not hear of it. “Even if all fall away, I will not,” he said, Mark 14:29. Yet the Lord insisted Peter would deny Him—not once, not twice, but three times—that night, Mark 14:30.

Christ knew the heart of His followers. He knew them better than they knew themselves. Still Peter “emphatically” refused to accept the word of the Lord, Mark 14:31.

The greatest tragedy of life is to lose God and not miss him.

As predicted, all of the disciples deserted Jesus, Mark 14:50. They scattered like a flock of frightened pigeons. Their resolve was weak. Their confessions of loyalty were shallow. Their bravado was fiction not fact. Why did Peter fall?

- **Confidence in self.** Jesus said their failure was etched in ancient prophecy, Matthew 26:31. Peter bristled at such a notion. The smiting of the Shepherd might bother others. It would not bother him. His reaction was rash, arrogant, and boastful. Peter placed himself above the others, Matthew 26:33. He presumed too much. In the end, his self-confidence became his embarrassment.


- **Aloof from Jesus.** Peter followed the Lord at a distance, Mark 14:53,54. It is common for some believers to keep Christ at arm’s length. When they should be at His side, they remain far away. Physical separation is a sign of spiritual separation. Greater distance brings greater danger. Away from His presence, there is exposure to temptation. The strays become easy victims of satan, James 4:8a.

- **Influence of others.** Peter “sat” with the enemy, Luke 22:55. He hobnobbed with the adversary. This was an unnecessary mixing with the opposition. There was no reason to believe his faith would be reinforced by their fellowship. He saw Jesus vilified. Why go there? No wonder Peter stumbled. He walked right into the trap.

The lesson is clear. We must not let our guard down, II Peter 3:17. The mistake of Peter was preventable, II Peter 1:10,11. We have choices to make, people to avoid, I Corinthians 10:12,13. In order to do right, we must shun wrong, Psalms 1:1,2.

Oh Lord, I cringe at disowning You. I must stand guard, pray, and resist the tempter. Through Him, who issued the warning. Amen.
“Where are all His wonders?” Judges 6:13.

Gideon lived in desperate times. The Midianites had invaded the country. They “impoverished” Israel, Judges 6:1-6. God heard their cry for help. He sent an unnamed prophet to remind them of His great power, of His former rescue, Judges 6:7-9.

Later an angel of the Lord visited Gideon, Judges 6:11,12. The greeting of the angel startled him. He did not consider himself “a mighty warrior.” Gideon, like the rest of his countrymen, was scared. He was unsure of the presence of God, Judges 6:13. If the Lord was with them, how were they to know?

- **Source of doubt.** Gideon struggled to believe. It seemed that God had forgotten to be merciful, Psalms 77:9. The troubles of Gideon seemed to preclude all hope. While wrapped in darkness, it was difficult to see the light. Yet God is often nearest when distress is deepest, Psalms 23:4; Isaiah 43:2. Was sensationalism blinding Gideon to the quiet movement of providence? Is not the Lord with us now as much as He was with those in ancient times? Deuteronomy 31:6; 1 Kings 8:57; Haggai 1:13; Matthew 28:20.

- **Time of need.** Gideon lived so long in the apparent absence of God that he could not imagine the presence of God. Where was He? Where was His kindness? There are many today who ask the same questions. It is difficult reconciling the presence of God with violence, poverty, and pain in our midst. Does the Lord care? If He does, how do we explain the absence of miraculous intervention? We pray but heaven is silent. Is hope only a cruel dream? Psalms 27:7-10.

- **Promise of presence.** Gideon admitted that God was present in the past. “But now,” he said, “the Lord has abandoned us,” Judges 6:13. Jehovah countered his pessimism with a command—a command to get involved. “Am I not sending you?” God asked, Judges 6:14. It is hard to feel part of the game when one stands on the sidelines. The idle doubt. The busy believe. Their weakness is turned into strength. They “became powerful” during the battle, Hebrews 11:34. Assurance does not come from waiting but from working, Hebrews 6:10-12. Faith is found in the faithful, 1 John 3:18,19.


Was God present? Yes! Did Gideon see wonders? Yes! Judges 6:20-22. The Lord was there, Judges 6:16. The Midianites were defeated, Judges 7:19-21. We need only open our eyes to see the Lord all around us, 2 Kings 6:15-17. God is in the highest heights. He is in the deepest depths, Psalms 139:7-10. Why ask for miracles when the Lord is already with us? If we make room for Him, He will abide within us. Count on it!

*Father, open my eyes. You are present. Your wonders are everywhere.*
*I do not believe because I see. I see because I believe. Thank You for being in my life. I pray through Christ, who is with me, Amen.*
November 23


The psalmist asked God for protection, Psalms 12:1; cf. Psalms 16:1; 17:8. He felt deep despair. Honesty had vanished. Deception was as common as dirt. No one cared. They said whatever they wanted to say. Their callous minds were filled with falsehood, Psalms 73:7-9.

This is also true today. Contractors cheat. Lawyers lie. Accountants “cook the books.” Financial investors commit fraud. Politicians “talk out of both sides of their mouth.” The tongue, the scripture says, sets the whole course of life ablaze, James 3:6.

- **The request of the righteous.** The sin of society sickens the soul of the saints. We are tired of hearing about crime. Where is virtue? Where is truth? Because we yearn for right, we grieve over the presence of wrong. We pray for God to “cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue” Psalms 12:3. We live in a difficult time. We weep over the corruption in the world, Psalms 73:16. Evil people flaunt their wickedness. They claim victory because they think they have a right to say whatever comes to mind, Psalms 12:4. In spite of their brash claims, however, a man does not own his tongue, Psalms 100:3; I Corinthians 6:19,20. Rather, because of the tongue, he possesses “the power of life and death,” Proverbs 18:21. For he will “give account on the day of judgment for every careless word” he has spoken, Matthew 12:36,37.

- **The response of God.** The saints believe that God will make Himself known, Isaiah 64:1,2. He will arise and protect them from careless speech and malicious talk, Psalms 12:5. We do not know when or how the Lord will respond. We are confident that He will, content that He hears our plea, Psalms 17:6; 86:7; 91:14-16. The promise of God is certain. His words are “flawless,” Psalms 12:6. They have been “thoroughly tested,” Psalms 119:140. In every age, the children of God have trusted Him. He has proven Himself to be faithful. He will keep the righteous from being sucked into the vortex of evil, Psalms 12:7; cf. Psalms 27:5. “The wicked will strut about when what is vile is honored among men,” Psalms 12:8. Their strutting will eventually cease. God has put forces in operation that will rectify all social wrongs, Revelation 21:6-8.

It is good policy not to speak unless one can improve the silence.

Society is rotten. The unscrupulous are on the throne. Truth is scorned as folly. The father of lies holds sway in the hearts of men. Evil is worshipped, Romans 1:28-32. Better days are ahead. A kind word, a faithful rebuke, a manly protest against careless speech may be the turning point. Our part in a nicer world is clear, Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 3:8-10. God bless our efforts to be honest in all things.

*Father, my heart is heavy. I live in a wicked world. Sin is championed. Wrong is declared right. Most people could care less. Keep me safe. Help me navigate around the quick sand of deception. This is my prayer, in Jesus name, Amen.*
The symbol of warfare is often used to illustrate the rigor of faithful living. Christianity is far from a benign withdrawal from the battlefield. Believers are called to take up arms and enter the fray, Psalms 18:32-34; II Corinthians 10:3-5.

- **Our enemy.** Spiritual warfare is not a conflict against “flesh and blood,” Ephesians 6:12. The enemy lives in the “heavenly realms,” Ephesians 1:3; 2:6. He opposes the children of God, Ephesians 6:11. We confront the “rulers, “authorities,” and “forces” of this dark world—the realm where satan holds sway, Luke 4:5,6. This is the shadowy world of evil, the haunt of vanity. It is the chamber of misery, the region of ruthless disregard for all that is decent and good.

- **Our strength.** Believers cannot win the battle by themselves. They need the power of God, Ephesians 3:16; 6:10. His power becomes our strength when we trust in Him, II Corinthians 12:9. Faith is like an extension cord. When plugged into God, divine strength flows into human beings. The key is being plugged in, Ephesians 1:18-21; 3:20; Colossians 1:29. But, when we are firmly jointed to Him, we become more than conquerors through Him who loved us, Romans 8:35,37-39.

- **Our armor.** Christians must be ready. Combat is inevitable. Satan is on the prowl, I Peter 5:8. When we accept Christ, we enlist in His army. We are issued a full set of military gear. The armament helps us stand our ground, Ephesians 6:13-17. The emphasis is on being completely prepared. The devil is single minded, combat ready, and battle hardened. He is blindly determined and fiercely aggressive. He must not be taken lightly. Only the brave will win the skirmish, II Timothy 4:7,8.

- **Our strategy.** In the end, prayer is the best weapon, Ephesians 6:18a. A saint on his knees makes the devil nervous. And, when prayer is uttered through the “Spirit,” satan meets his match, Romans 8:26,27. Therefore, we “should always pray and not give up,” Luke 18:1. It is possible for believers, with one prayerful request, to marshal the mighty battalions of eternity, Matthew 26:53. We have a defeat-proof plan for a sure-fire victory.

  God will save from death and shame
  All those who respect and trust His name.

Christians are engaged in a real battle, Jude 3. Our armor is not forged on a human anvil nor tempered by earthly skill. It is supplied by heaven. We fight because we are commanded. We wage war to keep our crown, Revelation 3:11. We struggle because victory is assured, James 4:7. We win because God empowers the faithful, Isaiah 40:29.

*Thank You, Lord. The enemy is shackled. Though he fitfully thrashes about, his days are numbered. I proudly wear the armor so that I can keep the crown. In Him, Amen.*
In the ancient world, a name was not merely an identification label. It stood for the nature of its bearer. Hence, to know the name of God was to know God, Psalms 9:10. Likewise, to blaspheme “the Name,” was to blaspheme the Lord, Leviticus 24:11. Obviously a name carried enormous significance.

• **Existence.** It was believed a name was necessary for existence. Nothing really lived unless it had a name, Ecclesiastes 6:10a. Consequently, creation was not complete until all creatures were named, Genesis 2:18-20a. God created the stars. He brought them into existence one by one—calling them by name, Isaiah 40:26. Human existence was continued after death when a name was perpetuated by descendants, I Samuel 24:21; Job 18:17; Psalms 83:4; Isaiah 14:22; 66:22.

• **Personality.** A name revealed who the person was. For example, “Jacob” meant “deceiver” or someone you takes from others by deception, Genesis 27:36. A name was believed to embody the personality of its wearer, I Samuel 25:25. So a change in character was accompanied by a change in name, Genesis 32:26-28. And, to be called by the name of a person, meant to be owned and protected by that individual, II Samuel 12:26-28; Isaiah 4:1. The same applied to the name of God, Isaiah 63:18,19; 65:1. Does this not shed light on praying “in the name of Jesus?”

• **Reputation.** When the actions of a person became widely known, he gained a reputation, Genesis 11:4. To “make a name” for oneself meant to receive “glory,” “renown,” or “fame.” Abraham was promised great renown (if he obeyed God), Genesis 12:2. David won fame for himself through his military exploits, I Samuel 18:30; II Samuel 8:13. Therefore, to have “a good name” was to possess a good reputation, Proverbs 22:1. Conversely, to have a bad name was to be “nameless,” Job 30:8.

When applied to God, His “name” disclosed who He was, Isaiah 52:6. It revealed His essence, nature, and character. He was hidden until He made Himself known, until He voiced His name, “I am who I am,” He said, Exodus 3:14. His name conveyed the idea of eternal existence, Psalms 102:25-27; Isaiah 43:10-13.

“From everlasting to everlasting You are God,” Psalms 90:2.

God declared His foreversness. He was, He is, and He ever will be—eternal, uncaused, and self-existent. There was a profound distinction between Jehovah and all the other gods. He alone was the great “I am.” There was no other god like Him, Exodus 8:10; 9:14; 15:11. “I am who I am” is His name. He is to be remembered as the one, eternal God who is from everlasting to everlasting, Exodus 3:15.

*O Lord, eternal God, I praise Your matchless name. Thanks for making Yourself known in Your One and Only Son. In the name of Jesus, Amen.*
November 26

“People who want to get rich fall into temptation.” I Timothy 6:9.

Money is not the issue, Proverbs 30:7,8. The “love of money” is, I Timothy 6:10. Money in and of itself is neutral. The danger is in the desire to get rich, I Timothy 6:9.

“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul,” Mark 8:36.

It is not wrong to be wealthy. The apostle merely insisted that wealth was unnecessary for living a godly life, I Timothy 6:6-8. Because of the risks involved in possessing great treasures, contentment was advised, Proverbs 13:7; Ecclesiastes 5:19; Philippians 4:11; Hebrews 13:5. No amount of riches can atone for poverty of character. In such cases, one is better off not being better off, I Timothy 6:17-19. Why is the love of money so dangerous?


• **Empty dream.** People who want to get rich fall into a trap, I Timothy 6:9. The trap is the belief that money brings security, Psalms 49:5-9; Matthew 6:19. The poor do not need bodyguards, Proverbs 13:8. Wealth cannot buy security. It cannot purchase health, love, or happiness. The perpetual bliss of the wealthy is a mirage, a vain illusion, Proverbs 23:5; 27:24; Ecclesiastes 6:2.

• **Sinful selfishness.** Money can make one self-centered, Matthew 6:2. It means little to the rich that others remain poor so that they can live in luxury. The “have nots” use the “haves” to satisfy themselves, Psalms 62:10; Proverbs 22:16; Amos 2:7,8. The conscience dies. Others become mere instruments (or obstacles) in the path to personal gain, James 5:4-6.

• **Wearisome anxiety.** The more a man has the more he worries about losing it, Psalms 39:6; Ecclesiastes 4:7,8. Money does not rescue from distress, Job 36:19. It will not save one from the grim reaper, Proverbs 11:4. Why worry? God promises to care for those who put their trust in Him, Matthew 6:31-34.

• **Unwholesome goal.** The love of money “plunges men into ruin,” I Timothy 6:9. In the end, the money monger is filled with regret, Proverbs 11:28; Jeremiah 17:11. The rich eventually discover the damage they inflicted. Their wealth will not compensate for their remorse, Proverbs 11:16. The jury has decided, Psalms 52:5-7. The Lord has spoken, Matthew 6:24. Are we listening?

Father, money is a means not an end. Capitalism can be a dangerous economic philosophy. I will learn to be content in whatever situation I find myself. You will care for me. In Christ, my Provider, Amen.
“They will know that a prophet has been among them,” Ezekiel 2:5.

Ezekiel was sent by God. He repeated what he was told to say, Exodus 4:15,16; 7:1. The understanding of his assignment gave the prophet courage. Like a presidential press secretary, Ezekiel was the spokesman for heaven. Most people would reject the words of Ezekiel. But the prophet had nothing to fear, Jeremiah 1:8,19.

Instead of seeing difficulty in every opportunity, he should see opportunity in every difficulty.

- **Empowered.** The Holy Spirit empowered the servants of God from the earliest days, Numbers 24:2,3a; I Samuel 10:6. The Spirit also spoke to Ezekiel, Ezekiel 2:1,2. The prophet got on his feet. He was ready for action, prepared to go. Ezekiel listened. Because he obeyed a simple command, he was ready to tackle a more complex one. The prophet had to get up before he could get going.

- **Deployed.** Ezekiel was sent to an obstinate, rebellious people, Ezekiel 2:3,4. They had a longstanding habit of rebelling against God. From the exodus to the exile, Israel had chaffed at the instructions of the Lord. It was not likely they would be receptive. Their hearts were calloused. They were intent on sinning. The prospects of success for the prophet were less than good. Still, whether they listened or refused to listen, Ezekiel was required to speak, Ezekiel 3:11,27; 12:1,2.

- **Encouraged.** Ezekiel had a tough task ahead of him, Ezekiel 2:6. He was called to render fearless obedience in the middle of frightening circumstances, Jeremiah 1:8; cf. Matthew 10:26-31. Those who have departed from the path of righteousness are not easily induced to return to it, Ecclesiastes 1:15. They were sin hardened—blind and deaf. Ezekiel was asked to square his shoulders and stiffen his spine. The Lord would give him the strength to persevere, Ezekiel 3:7-9.

- **Commissioned.** Ezekiel was told to speak the words of God, Ezekiel 2:7; cf. Jeremiah 1:17; Matthew 10:19,20. The prophet was not to mix his ideas with the instructions of the Lord, Ezekiel 22:28. As a herald, the prophet must deliver the words he received—no additions, no subtractions, no substitutions. He was a caretaker of the message, II Corinthians 2:17.

This passage has a special significance for ministers of the word. It shows them the rigors of their appointment, the boundaries of their task, and the source of their strength. It warns them against altering the message. It clarifies the purpose of their actions, Ezekiel 2:5. It validates the reason for being faithful to the end, II Corinthians 2:14-16.

_Father, I am determined to deliver Your word, to demonstrate that a prophet has spoken. Bless my efforts. Through Jesus, and for His glory, Amen._
November 28

“What are you doing here?” I Kings 19:9b.


God came to His prophet. He asked, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” I Kings 19:9b. A few days earlier the prophet challenged the royal court. Now he sat under a broom tree in the desert begging the Lord to take his life. His conduct was full of contradiction. How could this be? What happened?

• **Question of God.** The prophet was exhausted. Like Jeremiah, his fatigue drove him to find solitude, Jeremiah 9:2. At Mt. Horeb, also called Mt. Sinai, this battle weary warrior of God, withdrew into a cave, I Kings 19:9a. Elijah was a member of the hall of fame among the faithful, Hebrews 11:36-39. So why did he retreat to a cave? He was tired and disappointed, I Kings 19:10. God repeated the question. “What are you doing here, Elijah? I Kings 19:13b. The prophet offered the same answer, I Kings 19:14.

• **Frustration of the prophet.** Elijah was disgusted with the spiritual condition of the people. He was overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness to change them. He doubted his ability to make a difference. His ministry seemed fruitless. His achievements were few. “I am no better than my ancestors,” he said, I Kings 19:4b,c. And, in addition to all of that, Elijah was exhausted. His body was weak. The prophet was a dispirited, broken man, Jeremiah 6:10.

• **Help of heaven.** The Lord ministered to His prophet. He fed Elijah, I Kings 19:5b,6. Then, after the prophet took a nap, He fed him a second time, I Kings 19:7,8. The journey was too much for him to go without physical nourishment. Once he regained his strength, God told him to get busy. The Lord had work for him to do, I Kings 19:15,16. The worshippers of Baal were doomed. God was ready to judge them, I Kings 19:17. The labor of Elijah had not been in vain, I Kings 19:18; cf. Isaiah 49:1-6; I Corinthians 15:58.

> When we seek the Lord,  
> He gives us something to do.

Why escape to the desert? Why grow “weary in doing good?” Galatians 6:9. Our feeble thoughts and listless tones expose our hopeless hearts. We should not give up. We must not hide in solitude. We were called to deliver the invitation of God on the “street corners” of life, Matthew 22:1-10. The Lord is telling us “to go back the way we came,” to renew our commitment, to get involved again.

> There are times when my life is barren, my efforts are fruitless. But You,  
> Father, provide me nourishment. You call me back to work. Thank You,  
> for Your loving patience. Through Him, who knows my infirmities, Amen.
November 29

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him,” John 6:44.

The people were slow to understand. They saw Jesus feed the five thousand. They recognized He was an extraordinary person, John 6:14. They were asked to believe that Jesus was the Christ—the Messiah sent by God, John 6:28,29. Could the miracle worker and the promised messiah be one and the same? The people hesitated, John 6:26,27.

- **Doubting of sinners.** The people were confused. Jesus said He had “come down from heaven.” But everyone knew He was the kid from Nazareth, John 6:41,42. The crowd was divided. Some doubted. A few thought it was possible. All seemed surprised, John 7:12. Was He the Christ? Was it possible He came from heaven? John 6:32,33. The people wanted the bread, John 6:34. Yet the truth about the Bread of Life was difficult to swallow, John 6:60.

- **Drawing of God.** No one can come to faith unless they are drawn by the Lord, John 6:65. Everyone is estranged from God by sin, Isaiah 59:2. They are pulled in another direction by the allurements of the flesh, Galatians 5:17,19-21. Heaven draws us home, John 8:27,28. The attraction is not physical. It is not forced. It is gentle. It is the persuasive influence of love. The Father calls. His children respond. The magnetism of His kind heart draws men away from the cruel world. At first glance, this does not make sense. Even the disciples of Jesus complained, John 6:61-64.

- **Coming of saints.** Men are so locked in sin that they cannot see the light. They are blind to their own helplessness, Ephesians 4:17-19. Unless the Father takes the first step, His children are unable to reach Him. The process begins with an invitation from the Lord, Matthew 11:28. Following that initial move, humans must set at His feet and learn from Him, Matthew 11:29,30. A receptive heart is required, John 6:45. God draws. Men come. No one is rejected, John 6:37. The welcome mat is out. The hungry are fed. The thirsty receive water. The weary find rest. Still many turn back and no longer follow Him, John 6:66. Jesus wanted them to stay, John 6:67. But few of them recognized that He alone possessed the words of eternal life, John 6:68,69.

The Bread of Life is offered to all—free to all—sufficient for all!

Why do people turn away? Matthew 23:37. They have so much to gain! They have nothing to lose! Their problem is threefold. (1) They evaluate Jesus in human terms. How could a carpenter be the Christ? (2) They argue among themselves. Are their opinions greater than the words of God? And (3) they resist divine kindness. Why do the lost reject the Savior? The decision is up to us, Jeremiah 31:3. He has already taken the first step. Now it is our turn.

_Sovereign Lord, it is awesome to recognize the power of decision. I can actually resist Your love. Though You draw me, I can push You away. May that never happen. Because Jesus has the words of eternal life. Amen._
November 30

“Your peace would have been like a river,” Isaiah 48:18.

What should have been did not happen. It is distressing to ponder what might have taken place. It is fatal not to learn from the past, Deuteronomy 32:28,29; Isaiah 47:7; I Corinthians 10:6-11. God teaches through history. He invites us to reflect on alternatives which should have been pursued, Isaiah 42:23-25; Hosea 7:8-10.

Why did Israel fail? The Lord guided her, Psalms 23:3. He showed His people what was required of them, Micah 6:8. He intended to lead them in straight paths but they forced Him to detour down the road of affliction, Jeremiah 2:11. Israel would not listen. She would not follow in His footsteps, Psalms 81:13-16.

- **Regrets of God.** The heavenly Father tenderly taught and patiently directed Israel, Isaiah 48:17. From the beginning, He gently led her in the way she was supposed to go, Isaiah 63:11-14. If only Israel had paid attention, Isaiah 48:18a. God did not want to punish. He had no desire to cause pain. He wished only the best for His people. But they did not care. Sadly, God was tossed aside, snubbed like a jilted lover, Matthew 23:37.

- **Options of man.** Israel was free to choose, Joshua 24:15,16. She was fully aware of her options, Deuteronomy 10:12,13; I Samuel 12:24,25. And, in spite of all that, she chose badly. She used her freedom to disobey. Jehovah was not happy that Israel stumbled. What might have been did not come to pass, Isaiah 48:18b,19. God was willing to bless. Israel was not willing to be blessed. She squandered her opportunity, frittered away her birthright, Isaiah 1:19,20.

- **Blessings of obedience.** The Lord does not forget. What He said, He wanted to do. His intentions were noble. The fault rested in Israel. She was stubborn. She went astray. She failed to follow His directions, Psalms 95:7b-11. Still there was a ray of hope. God would graciously call her again. He would forgive if she would repent, Job 14:15-17. He begged her to leave exile, Isaiah 48:20. For, He said, “There is no peace for the wicked,” Isaiah 48:22. Neither are there any regrets for those who trust in the Lord!

True peace is not the absence of war but the presence of God.

The peace of God is like a river that flows all year long. A wadi is a seasonal dry wash—a torrent one moment and an empty creek bed the next, Job 6:15-17. Many believers are like dry washes—occasional bursts of peace followed by lengthy intervals of misfortune. That need not be the case. The Lord offers us peace like a river, Isaiah 66:12,13. Are we making the right choices to have that kind of constant tranquility? Isaiah 32:17.

Kind Father, I am slow to realize that I cannot have the cake of peace while I eat the dessert of sin. May I live so that there will be no regrets here or in the hereafter. Through the Prince of Peace, Amen.
December 1

“We should not make it difficult for the Gentiles,” Acts 15:19.

Paul and Barnabas converted many Gentiles on their first missionary journey, Acts 14:27. Some of the Jews from Jerusalem were shocked. These brethren believed a Gentile (or non-Jew) must be circumcised, Acts 15:1. A “sharp dispute” erupted, Acts 15:2a. Must a Gentile become a Jew in order to be a Christian? The question was not new. Earlier Peter stirred the same debate when he baptized an uncircumcised Roman soldier, Acts 10:44-48. This did not set well with the circumcision brethren, Acts 11:1-3. The controversy became intense. It fractured the Body of Christ. A meeting was convened to settle the problem, Acts 15:2b.

• **Open discussion was necessary.** Like most disagreements, the opinions were mixed. There were those who believed “the Gentiles must be circumcised” and “obey the law of Moses,” Acts 15:5. There were others who said the Gentiles were “purified” by faith, Acts 15:8,9. Tension was in the air. Emotions were ready to boil over. The scene was volatile. To an outsider the conversation appeared to be a frivolous dispute over an unimportant opinion. To the participants it was a serious discussion.

• **Kind courtesy was required.** Each group had reasons for their position. The circumcision party could cite a longstanding commandment, Genesis 17:9-14. The opposition group said that men were now “justified by faith in Christ,” Galatians 2:15,16. Both groups had their point of view. The discussion could go on and on till reason gave way to rancor, till deliberation turned into winning a debate. But Christians must not argue, Philippians 2:14,15. Peace should be their trademark, Romans 14:19; Hebrews 12:14.

• **Honest compromise was found.** No group has all of the truth all of the time on all subjects. Each has a contribution to make. Everyone should be active in speaking and listening. God commanded unity in salvation essentials, Galatians 1:6-9. He desired flexibility in cultural practices, Romans 14:1-3. He wanted believers to live in harmony with one another, Colossians 3:12-14. The brethren found an equitable compromise, Acts 15:28,29. They did not want to make it difficult for others, John 17:20,21.

Practicing unity is more important than preaching unity.

Truth must be sought at all times. It does not reside in clever logic, heated quarrel, or majority opinion. The truth is found in God, Psalms 31:4,5; Isaiah 45:19. Those who pursue it must let go of preconceived motions. Former habits must be abandoned, I Corinthians 16:14. All ideas contrary to the scripture must be laid aside. Crippling divisions must be avoided, I Corinthians 1:10. May the Lord grant us the grace to pursue unity in the bond of peace, Ephesians 4:1-6.

*Lord, I love the Church. But she is rift with division, alienated by competing doctrine. May I be part of the solution rather than a contributor to the problem. I pray, in the name of the Celestial Mediator, Amen.*
Wisdom warns against concern over what others think. If a person has a desire for praise, he will likely be disappointed. Others do not value us as much as we value ourselves. No one is perfect, Ecclesiastes 7:20. Put little stock in their opinion, I Corinthians 4:3. Do not look for applause. Do not live for acclaim. It is fleeting.

On swift wings scandals fly, 
While kind deeds quickly die.

Humans relish the sordid. Do we not say hurtful things about others? Ecclesiastes 7:22. Therefore, we should be “deaf” and “dumb” to the malignant gloating of our critics, Psalms 38:13-16. We should be so busy improving our life that we have no time for the disapproval of others.

• **A careless tongue.** An unkind word, a single careless statement can destroy a close friendship, Proverbs 17:9. We are often tempted to utter a hurtful comment. It may be true. It may make a good story. But it defames another person. We are judged by our words, Matthew 12:36,37. It is not our duty to say all we know. It is our responsibility to “cover” offenses, Proverbs 10:12; 17:28; I Peter 4:8. One snowball of suspicion can trigger an avalanche of gossip, Proverbs 16:28. There is always someone who is negligent. They may causally misrepresent or falsely color the facts. They may amplify the bad and minimize the good. One unguarded word can start a train of sad consequences which no one has the power to stop, Proverbs 10:14.

• **A careful heart.** We cannot control the evil tongues of wicked people. But a life well lived can enable us to disregard them. No one can make us feel inferior without our consent. The ball is in our court. We are advised “to pay no attention” to what others say. Literally, the Bible says, we are to give no “heart” to our detractors. In contemporary speech, we are to pay them no mind. It is God who judges. The apostle Paul said, “Judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes,” I Corinthians 4:4,5. It is better we do not know what others think. And, where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise. People say hurtful things, Matthew 5:11,12. Yet their words do not determine who we are. God does. Let us not give them the time of day.

People do not like us to be better than they are. They often wish to bring us down to their level. But, in the process, they inevitably lower themselves in the eyes of others, Proverbs 13:3. There is no need to take their words seriously. Gossip is poison. Why drink it? Hearsay is often unpleasant. Why should we be a party to it? Selective listening has much value. When we are wronged, a poor memory is the best defense.

It hurts when we are misrepresented. Careless words destroy. But You, Lord, have the last word. I rely on Your mercy. I wait for Your judgment. Through Jesus Christ, my friend, who knows me as I really am, Amen.
December 3

“It is the Lord your God you must follow,” Deuteronomy 13:4.

Israel was entering the Promised Land. Pagans already lived there. Idolatry was rampant. Israel must destroy the gods, Deuteronomy 4:15-20. She was to remain a holy people, Deuteronomy 7:1-6. Israel must worship Jehovah only, Deuteronomy 12:29-31.

“You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,” I Thessalonians 1:9.

Because Israel would live among idolaters, temptations to forsake the Lord would confront them. They must be vigilant, stay the course, and do exactly what God commanded them, Deuteronomy 12:32; cf. Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:5,6.

The suggestion to bow down to idols would come from various sources. Prophets may deceive the people, Deuteronomy 13:1-3. Relatives may entice their loved ones, Deuteronomy 13:6-8. The community may lead them astray, Deuteronomy 13:12-15.

The people must not turn from the Lord. The sin of idolatry could not be tolerated. The prophet was to be put to death, Deuteronomy 13:4,5. The relative was to be stoned, Deuteronomy 13:9-11. The community was to be destroyed, Deuteronomy 13:16.

• Caution to the Church. The treatment of idolaters sounds harsh. But there are occasions when severity is the greatest kindness, when tolerance is the greatest cruelty. Is that not true in the case of cancer? The surgery must be as severe as the disease in order to heal. Whether Nadab and Abihu, Leviticus 10:2; Achan, Joshua 7:15; Uzziah, II Samuel 6:7; Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:1-5, the immoral man in Corinth, I Corinthians 5:1-5, or Hymenaeus and Alexander, I Timothy 1:18-20, sin must be purged. The people of God in all ages were to keep themselves separate from the world, Deuteronomy 13:17,18; cf. Matthew 18:15-17; Titus 3:9-11.

• Warning to the saint. The innocent can be corrupted, Hebrews 2:1-3; 10:26-31. Seduction lurks everywhere. God holds each saint responsible, Deuteronomy 10:12,13. The commands of the Lord are for our own good. Nothing must be allowed to sway our minds. Extreme measures are required to stay on the right path, Matthew 5:29,30. Even our closest relationships must be renounced if they collide with our loyalty to Christ, Luke 14:26,27. Neutrality is not an option, Matthew 12:30. The righteous of God must stand guard, Matthew 24:10-13; II Peter 3:17; Jude 17-23.

Idolatry still exists, Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5. We may not bow to an idol god. Yet, if we put our ultimate trust in things or persons, rather than the Lord, we are de facto idolaters, I Corinthians 10:7,14; I John 5:21. We commit treason against heaven. We rob God of His honor. We forfeit our inheritance in the kingdom, Ephesians 5:5.

Lord, You are the true and living God. I hear Your warning against idolatry. I abandon all idols. I want to serve You alone. Through Christ Jesus, Amen.
“Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these,” Matthew 19:14.

The Lord had just discussed the sanctity of marriage. “Then,” immediately after that discussion, He blessed the fruit of marriage. Children were brought to Him. It was a custom to take infants to the synagogue to receive the prayers and benedictions of the rabbi, Matthew 19:13a.

As a rule, children were kept in the background. So the interest of the Lord in children was a bit unusual, Matthew 18:1,2. It is instructive to focus on the various people involved in this incident: the mothers, the children, and the disciples.

• **The mothers.** The love of the mothers for their children was like the compassion of God for Israel, Isaiah 66:13. The mothers were concerned for the well being of their babies, Luke 18:15a. Understandably they wanted the Master to “touch” them, Mark 10:13a. Jesus did much more. He scooped them into His arms, embraced them, and blessed them, Mark 10:16. He loved them for their willingness to receive Him, Mark 10:15.

• **The children.** Membership in the kingdom required a child-like attitude, 1 Peter 2:1-3. Children want (or, better, beg for) nourishment. The milk is a gift—something the infants do not earn, something they can not provide for themselves. They are completely dependent. Unless an adult has a similar attitude they will be unable to enter the kingdom. In effect, repentance was required, Matthew 18:3,4. Self sufficiency must be laid aside, John 3:27.

• **The disciples.** The followers of Jesus were outraged, Matthew 19:13b. Yet Christ had just taught them to welcome little children, Matthew 18:5. Obviously the disciples missed the point. Jesus was “indignant,” Mark 10:14. And rightly so. When children are barred from coming to the Lord, the Father in heaven is unhappy, Matthew 18:12-14. We do not know why the disciples tried to stand in the way. But we certainly know we should not do as they did, Matthew 18:6.

“Children (are) a reward (from the Lord),” Psalms 127:3.

Jesus wanted the children to come to Him, Matthew 19:14. Parents must not hold them back. Followers of Jesus must not discourage them, Matthew 18:10. The kingdom is theirs. It “belongs” to them, Luke 18:16. It belongs to all of those who are like them—innocent, trusting, dependent, and submissive. Happy are those who—by the grace of the Lord and the quickening of the Spirit—recover the simplicity, the freshness, and purity of childhood.

*Father in heaven, You cradle me in Your everlasting arms.*
*You offer me Your kingdom. I long to be Your child, to believe Your word, to obey Your commands, and to receive Your blessing.*
*Because He welcomes me, I pray in His name, Amen.*
Nadab and Abihu...offered unauthorized fire,” Leviticus 10:1.

It was an exciting time in Israel. The tabernacle was built. The sacrificial system was announced. The priesthood was ordained. The first official day of worship was ending. God showed His approval by sending fire to consume the sacrifice, Leviticus 9:23,24.

Nadab and Abihu wanted to acknowledge the presence of God. They quickly prepared an offering of incense. Their intentions were noble. Their actions were careless. They took hot coals from the altar of incense rather than the altar of sacrifice, Leviticus 16:12.

Nadab and Abihu “offered unauthorized fire.” God was not pleased, Leviticus 10:1,2. Heaven responded decisively. The people stood stalk-still in mind-numbing shock.

Sin may be called “a mistake,” but the results are still the same.

What was happening? Why was God angry? How should this incident be understood? Nadab and Abihu were died! A careful examination of their attitude, their offense, and their punishment can shed light on the whole affair, II Timothy 2:7.

• Their attitude. It appeared that Nadab and Abihu thought their choice was insignificant. Fire from one or the other altar did not matter to them. Some would argue they had too much wine to drink. So God forbade the priests to indulge while on duty, Leviticus 10:8,9. Certainly the minds of Nadab and Abihu were dull. Their guard was down. And, as a result, because of their negligence, they suffered the consequences.

• Their offense. The newly appointed priests had acted “contrary” to the command of the Lord, Leviticus 10:1. They took the right censer. They took the right incense. They took the wrong fire, Deuteronomy 4:2. No one has the authority to tamper with the instructions of God. It is our duty to study the written word, to learn the details of His “good, pleasing, and perfect will,” Romans 12:2.

• Their punishment. No one should trifle with God. He is “a consuming fire,” Hebrews 12:28,29; cf. Deuteronomy 4:24; 9:3; Psalms 97:1-3; Isaiah 33:14. Nadab and Abihu sinned. They received the fruit of their deeds, Proverbs 1:29-31; Isaiah 3:10,11. No wrath is worse than the wrath of God. So, when Aaron, the father of Nadab and Abihu, saw their punishment, he “remained silent,” Leviticus 10:3. Justice had been served.

What an awesome sight! The bodies of the deceased were carried out of the camp in full view. They were still wrapped in their singed vestments, Leviticus 10:4,5. From glory to disgrace, their priestly career ended almost before it began. Surely it should cause all of us to consider every element of our behavior—large or small, Romans 11:22.

Lord, it is not a trivial matter to disobey. Your stern response is a measure of Your disdain. I trust Your justice. I seek Your kindness. In Christ Jesus, Amen.
David was a teenage lad. He was a keeper of sheep. As a shepherd, he led a quiet, uneventful life. Nonetheless, things were about to change. Crisis was headed his way. Prompt action would be necessary.

David was anointed the next king, I Samuel 16:1,13. The young shepherd was thrust into public service, I Samuel 16:19,20. King Saul liked David, I Samuel 16:21. But the country bumpkin soon overshadowed the reigning monarch.

David killed Goliath, I Samuel 17:50. He became close friends with the crown prince, I Samuel 18:1. David was widely popular, I Samuel 18:6,7. Saul was consumed with envy, I Samuel 18:8,9. The king wanted to murder David, I Samuel 19:1,2; James 3:16.

He courts disaster who neglects the warning.

*Danger realized.* The tranquility of his rural life evaporated. The anointed one was in peril. Saul knew that as long as David was alive Jonathan would not become king, I Samuel 20:31. Such is the risk of the chosen, Matthew 2:13. Things have not changed in that regard. No position of privilege or service sets us above the possibility of falling, I Corinthians 10:11,12. David realized his predicament. Likewise, the apostle Paul knew he was vulnerable, I Corinthians 9:26,27. So we, too, should be on guard.

*Warning issued.* Jonathan devised a plan, I Samuel 20:19-22. A clear signal would be given. In a similar manner, God provides a way of escape in perilous situations, I Corinthians 10:13. The voice of sober judgment and friendly advice will warn of impending jeopardy. All of us have a Jonathan who suggests a speedy retreat from entanglement. When we stand on the brink of ruin, listen for the words: “Hurry! Go quickly! Don’t stop!” I Samuel 20:38.

*Action required.* In the case of David, his escape was fortunate. Though it cost him dearly, it saved his life and secured his well being. So it is for us. Whether present safety or future salvation, whether from man or God, we must heed the voice of warning, I Thessalonians 5:1-9. Jesus holds the keys of our destiny, Revelation 1:18. Why should we fall prey to the delusion that we are captain of our fate? Only a fool refuses to listen, Proverbs 12:15; 14:16; 28:26.


*Faithful God, loving Father, You know the perils I face. You sound the alarm. You point the way. I will humble myself, listen to Your words, and escape approaching harm. Thank You. Through Jesus, my Lord, Amen.*
While in Jerusalem, Jesus saw a blind man, John 9:1. As a visitor in the capital city, one might assume the Lord would be enamored with the beautiful buildings. His disciples were, Matthew 24:1. But Jesus was not a tourist. He came to rescue the perishing.

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost," Luke 19:10.

Christ healed the blind man, John 9:6,7. The disciples were dumbfounded. Why was the man blind? Who was at fault? John 9:2. It was good to ask the question. It was better to embrace the answer.

- **The question.** The query was caused by the man being “blind from birth.” Surely it was not his fault! Or was it? The disciples were puzzled. After all, there is a logical connection between sin and suffering. Acts 28:4; Romans 6:23. On more than one occasion, Jesus alluded to unrighteousness as the root of affliction, Luke 13:1,2; John 5:14. Simple observation reveals that disobedience brings hardship, pain, and calamity, Exodus 20:5. Every fractured family, every DWI accident, and every premeditated crime carries the fingerprints of sin. Who, then, should be blamed for the birth defect of the blind man? In light of the popular teachings of the time, the parents were the cause, John 9:34. Was that how Jesus understood it? The disciples had complete confidence in Christ. He could clear up the matter. So they asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents?” John 9:2.

- **The answer.** “Neither the blind man nor his parents” caused the problem, Jesus said, John 9:3. What a surprise! The understanding of the disciples was irrevocably challenged. There was another way of viewing the situation. Pain had purpose, Job 33:29,30. It is the megaphone of God. In every disaster, the Lord speaks. He urges us to see His love, to witness His healing, to experience His rescue, Job 34:12-15. The blind man had been a monument to human indiscretion. Now he became the poster boy for divine grace. Blame was removed. Blessing was bestowed. Jesus did not dwell on the past. He looked to the future. Speculation was unless. Obedience was encouraged, John 9:4,5.

Light shines brightest in the dark. The power of heaven is most keenly felt in weakness, II Corinthians 12:7-10. We are aware that unpleasant things happen. We fabricate theories. Yet only the Lord has the answer. Clearly intention and design pervade the universe. God will do what is fair and right, Job 36:22-26. We may WANT another answer, but we do not NEED another answer. He is in control. Trust Him.

Father, I rest in Your goodness. 
I will not be moved. You know best. 
Your will—not my wish—is paramount. 
May He, who knows and who cares, 
hear my words, Amen.
Everyone is terminal. As surely as spring flowers sprout, blossom, and wither, so humans are born, live, and die, Psalms 90:5,6; 92:6,7; 103:15,16. There are no exceptions, Job 14:12; I Peter 1:24,25. To deny the obvious is to ignore reality.

Here today! Gone tomorrow! That is the drum beat of material existence. Man marches to the grave. The Lord reigns forever, Psalms 9:7. Man changes. God is “the same yesterday, today, and forevermore,” Hebrews 13:8. Humans die. Jehovah is eternal, Isaiah 57:15a. We are temporary. He is permanent.

- **The temporary.** As morbid as it may sound, it is good to occasionally stroll through a cemetery. The gravestones are a reminder of human mortality, Job 24:22-25. In a few days, we shall be among the dead, Job 10:20-22. Our treasures will be left behind, Matthew 6:19-21. As travelers, we are headed for the unseen world. Every step we take, every breath we draw moves us closer to our destiny. There is no way to stop the journey. There is no possibility of prolonging the trip, Job 9:25,26. It will be over almost as soon as it began, Job 8:8,9. We were made from dust. We will soon return to dust. Therefore, let us number our days, Psalms 39:4-6.

- **The permanent.** Man is like a fragile flower. “But the word of God stands forever,” Isaiah 40:6-8; cf. Psalms 119:89; Proverbs 19:21. Though it might appear impossible, we will receive what God promises, Hebrews 6:13-15. Nothing is forgotten. God does not make mistakes. His word does not fail, Matthew 5:18. It accomplishes what He sends it to do, Isaiah 55:10,11. His instruction is trustworthy. His message is guaranteed. His word is flawless, II Samuel 22:31a; Proverbs 30:5. It is a lamp for our feet and a light to our path, Psalms 119:105. It guides us along the way, Psalms 23:3b. The Lord alone has the words of eternal life, John 6:66-68. Believers live on “every word that comes out of the mouth of the Lord,” Deuteronomy 8:3. His words are not casual conversation. They are our life, Deuteronomy 32:47a.

“Our generation is obsessed by dread. It fears the terrorist. It cringes at economic collapse, worries about global warming, and frets over impending chaos. Yet all of that is temporary. Why should people be so concerned about what will not last? Isaiah 51:12,13. The schemes of men will fail. The plans of the Lord will stand firm, Psalms 33:11. Those, therefore, who trust in Him will live forever, I John 2:17.

Thank You, gracious God, for Your everlasting word. It is permanent. I am temporary. Let me act accordingly. In Christ, who lives forever, days without end, Amen.
When God spoke to Israel, the people did not see Him, Deuteronomy 4:10-12. They only heard His voice. Because they saw “no form of any kind,” Israel was forbidden to make an image to represent God, Deuteronomy 4:15-20. In effect, they were to avoid pagan idolatry.

- **Origin of idolatry.** God put a quest for eternity in the heart of every human, Ecclesiastes 3:11. It is natural for people to seek Him, to reach out for Him, in an effort to find Him, Acts 17:27. The Lord cannot be seen. He is invisible to the human eye, John 1:18a. Yet He clearly demonstrated His invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature, Romans 1:18-20. But men want the invisible to be visible. So they make idols.

- **Curse of idolatry.** Idolatry exchanges the glory of the immortal God for mortal objects, Romans 1:21-23. These symbols for God are worshipped as gods. The worshippers are transformed into the likeness of these so called deities, Psalms 115:8. Idols are a curse. They corrupt the idolater, Romans 1:24,25. They exert a negative influence, lead people astray, I Corinthians 12:2. Doomed to progressive corruption, the idolater earns the disgust of Jehovah God, Romans 1:28-31. Believers, then, must keep themselves from idols, Deuteronomy 4:23; I John 5:21.

- **Nature of idolatry.** Idolatry is an obsession with created things (in lieu of devotion to the Creator), Ephesians 5:5; Philippians 3:19; Colossians 3:5. Idols are made by humans. They are mere pieces of wood and stone, Deuteronomy 27:15. Idols cannot “see or hear or eat or smell,” Deuteronomy 4:2; Psalms 115:2-7. They are “like a scarecrow in a melon patch,” Jeremiah 10:5. Idols have no value (for bonding the worshipper to God), Habakkuk 2:18,19.

- **Shame of idolatry.** Idols are helpless, Isaiah 41:7. They embarrass those who trust in them, Isaiah 42:17. Who saved Israel from slavery? Did the gods of Egypt? No! It was Jehovah who freed them? His rescue was proof that He was their God, Deuteronomy 4:32-35. There is no other Savior. He alone deserves our adoration. He alone is the Lord of heaven and earth. “There is no other,” Deuteronomy 4:39.

The Lord demonstrated His love for us. He seeks our single minded devotion. Like human affection, His love tolerates no rival. He is “jealous” when we bow down to an idol, Deuteronomy 4:24. His jealousy is as “unyielding as the grave,” Song of Songs 8:6. If He did not love us so much, He would not be so upset by our defection. Because He is “a jealous God, a consuming fire,” we must “flee from idolatry,” I Corinthians 10:14.

Loving Father, You are my only God. I have no other. I am committed to watch myself carefully, to avoid every form of idolatry. I want You to reign supreme over my life. In Jesus, who was uncompromisingly devoted to You, Amen.
“No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun,” Ecclesiastes 8:17.

Humans are curious. They struggle to understand life. They devote themselves to the pursuit of knowledge, Ecclesiastes 1:13. Try as he might, man comes up short. “Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it,” Ecclesiastes 8:17d.

This is as it should be. We are finite. The Lord is infinite. We cannot fathom the mysteries of God, Job 11:7-9. In the total scheme of things, we were born only yesterday. We know nothing, Job 8:9. A realization of our ignorance is a blessing. It puts us in our place. It calls for humility, submission, and faith.

In light of what happens on earth, human existence makes no sense. The wicked prosper. The righteous suffer, Ecclesiastes 8:14. The world is confusing. The more we study it, the less we understand it, Ecclesiastes 8:16,17. How, then, should we view this mystery?

- **From the divine perspective.** God does what He decides to do in heaven and on earth, Daniel 4:35. In other words, “He works out everything in conformity to His will,” Ephesians 1:11. The Lord is in control. His thoughts are deep. His works are vast. His ways past finding out, Psalms 77:19; Romans 11:33.

- **From the human perspective.** We are busy in our labor. We scurry about discovering, building, and maintaining our small corner of the world. Our activity is relentless. We get little sleep. We do not fully comprehend what we are weaving on the loom of history, Ecclesiastes 7:14.

God is the Captain of our ship. We are His passengers. Though we do not know the way, we trust in His skill to reach the destination, Psalms 92:4,5. He holds the map. He adjusts the rudder. He is “wonderful in counsel, magnificent in wisdom,” Isaiah 28:29.

He sends sun and rain, joy and pain;  
His ways on high are shielded from our eye.

Mysteries abound. We are unable to see the connection between the pieces and the whole. We do not recognize the order and symmetry of events, Isaiah 40:13,14. Though we want to know the cause of things, to find the clues for interpreting the perplexities of life, they remain beyond our reach, Job 5:9; Psalms 139:6; Isaiah 40:28. What, then, should we conclude? The limited cannot comprehend the limitless. His glory is beyond our grasp, Isaiah 55:8,9. Our safest eloquence is our silence, Psalms 46:10. For in Him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” Colossians 2:3.

Oh Lord, my God, my greatest ignorance is to reject what I do not know. My understandings are few. My knowledge is shallow. I depend on You to unravel the mysteries of life. Bless my blindness as I walk by faith. Through Jesus, my guide, Amen.
Salvation is found in faith, Romans 1:16,17. It “comes through faith in Jesus Christ,” Romans 3:21,22a. Evangelism is key, Romans 10:17. The message of grace is crucial, Ephesians 2:8,9. Hope for life after death rests in Him, Romans 5:1,2.

“In Him was life and the life was the light of men,” John 1:4.

What, then, will happen to those who never hear the Gospel? Paul said the Lord will judge everyone on the basis of what they have done, Romans 2:6. Those who “persistently” do good will receive eternal life, Romans 2:7. That is wonderful news. But, unfortunately, everyone falls far short of that high and noble standard, Romans 3:10-18.

This leads to some troubling questions. Are people who have never heard the Gospel doomed? Will God condemn all of those who do not have faith in His Son? The apostle gave little reason for hope to those outside of Christ.

• Everyone is sufficiently aware. The heathens are far from guiltless, Jeremiah 10:25a. They are “without excuse,” Romans 1:20. They know God, Romans 1:21,28,32. They see Him in nature. They are aware of right and wrong, Romans 2:14,15. Therefore, those who reject the truth and follow evil will feel the wrath of heaven, Romans 2:8.

• Everyone is held responsible. Paul believed that apart from redemptive grace humankind is lost, II Thessalonians 1:8. The heathen are confronted with sufficient data to know God, Psalms 19:1-4a. Those who rebel against such knowledge are guilty of suppressing the truth, Romans 1:18,19. Obviously, then, even those outside of Christ are held accountable.

Is that fair? Absolutely! Justice is the foundation of His throne, Psalms 89:14. There is no room for questioning His fairness, Job 8:3. How dare we suppose He perverts the truth, Nehemiah 9:33; Zephaniah 3:5. His judgments are infallible, Genesis 18:25; Deuteronomy 32:4; Job 34:10. Sinners will perish not because they lack the light but because they reject the light they have, Acts 17:30; Ephesians 4:17-20.

A growing number of people are vexed. They are uncomfortable with the exclusiveness of Christianity, John 14:6. Are the billions lost without Christ? Yes! Are we bigots for believing they will not be saved? No! We must surrender our feelings to the teachings of scripture, Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:11,12. The fate of those who have never heard is not a matter of personal opinions but inspired precepts, John 3:16.

You are a just God. Humanity is lost. Christ is the answer. May I stay true to Him and His word. Because He is the way, the truth, and the life, Amen.
December 12

“You do not have in mind the things of God,” Matthew 16:23.

Peter had just uttered the great confession, Matthew 16:16. He was known to be impetuous. He spoke before he thought. For, a few moments later, he scolded the Messiah, Matthew 16:22. Jesus was predicting His crucifixion, Matthew 16:21. The disciples “did not understand,” Mark 9:31b,32. Peter spoke out of ignorance. The Lord stopped him in his tracks, Matthew 16:23.

Ignorance is not bliss. It is a lack of understanding.

To the devil, in the wilderness of temptation, Christ said, “Away from Me, Satan,” Matthew 4:10. Scat! Get lost! Leave! To Peter, the Lord said, “Out of My sight.” Matthew 16:23a. Literally He told Peter to “get behind Him!” In effect, He asked His impulsive disciple to become a follower again!

• Setting of the rebuke. The word “Messiah” meant different things to different folks. To the disciples, it indicated a conquering warrior, a hero king who would drive out the Romans, Psalms 21:8-12; 72:8-14. To Jesus, it signified a vicarious sufferer, a redeemer of the world, Isaiah 53:8-12. Before the apostles could proclaim the Messiah, they had to learn who He really was.

• Reason for the rebuke. Jesus reacted to Peter because His bumbling disciple was tempting Him. “You are a stumbling block to Me,” the Lord said, Matthew 16:23b. Actually Peter was an agent of Satan. He was suggesting a compromise. The Lord was not eager to suffer. He did not relish dying, Luke 22:39-44. But should He abandon the will of God? Should He lower His standards?

• Meaning of the rebuke. Peter surely meant well. Nevertheless, he was not acting in the best interest of mankind. Had the Messiah listened to him, humanity would still be lost, Hebrews 9:22b; cf. Romans 3:22-26. Peter spoke out of love—albeit a misguided love. He wanted to protect Jesus (like a parent dissuading his child from being a missionary). Christ had to carry His cross. We must carry ours, Matthew 16:24-26.

We often think like men. We echo the prejudices of society, the feelings of those around us. After all, we live in this world. We are stuck in the here and now, I John 2:15,16. We live a considerable distance from heaven, Isaiah 55:8,9. We cannot bridge the gap.

Our thoughts are warped by sin. We do not submit to His will, Romans 8:7. “The mind of the sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life,” Romans 8:6. The Spirit in us changes our thinking. His impact on us is remarkable, Colossians 3:1-3. We learn to view everything differently, II Corinthians 5:16,17; Philippians 3:15.

Father, You made my mind. Fill it with Your Spirit. Help me think Your thoughts. Lift me above my understandings. I cannot do it myself. Through the Messiah, Amen.
December 13

“If you do not stand firm in your faith you will not stand at all,” Isaiah 7:9.

The situation was critical. In two recent battles, Ahaz, the king of Judah had been soundly defeated. First, the Arameans trounced his troops. Then, later, to add insult to injury, the Israelites “inflicted heavy casualties” on his army, II Chronicles 28:5. The cause was clear. “Judah had forsaken the Lord,” II Chronicles 28:6.

Ahaz and his people were filled with fear, Isaiah 7:2. Judah was in difficult straits. Her plight was bleak, Isaiah 7:6. King Ahaz asked Assyria for assistance. But, instead of help, Ahaz got himself deeper into trouble, II Chronicles 28:20. What was he to do? Where was he to turn?

“Be careful, keep calm, and do not be afraid,” Isaiah advised, Isaiah 7:4.

Given the circumstances, that was a tall order. Judah had every right to be worried. The signs were obvious. Her future had doom written all over it, Isaiah 6:11,12. Still the prophet begged them to trust in God.

“If you do not stand firm in your faith you will not stand at all,” Isaiah 7:9b.

- **The way of faith.** Faith is required. If we do not believe that corn will grow, we will not plant it. If we do not trust God, we will not pray for rescue. That is not a threat. It is a fact of life. It was for Noah, for Abraham, and for Moses, Hebrews 11:7,8,20-24. It is for us, too, Galatians 3:22. Faith helps us get through the minefields of this world. Faith is the firm conviction that God will do what He promised, Hebrews 11:1.

- **The way of doubt.** King Ahaz hesitated. He was overwhelmed by his predicament. When Isaiah prompted him “to ask the Lord...for a sign,” Ahaz refused, Isaiah 7:11,12. Doubt dooms the doubter. It kept the people of God out of the Promised Land, Hebrews 3:16-19. It is the cleverest ploy of the devil, Genesis 3:1. A lack of faith is like a fox in a chicken coop worrying about having enough to eat. The Lord expects more from us than that, Isaiah 7:9b; James 1:5-8.

We do not condone Ahaz. But we understand his actions, Matthew 26:41. We instinctively trust in ourselves. We prefer human power over religious piety. But “without faith it is impossible to please God,” Hebrews 11:6.

Faith does not alter the circumstances. It enables us to endure them. God keeps His promises. He will never leave us nor forsake us, Joshua 1:5. We must believe that and act accordingly, Psalms 62:5-8.

Merciful Lord, heavenly Father, You have asked me to trust You. May I do so regardless of the circumstances. Through my faithful Protector, Amen.
“What you are doing is not good,” *Exodus* 18:17.

In ancient Egypt, an elaborate judicial system handled civilian disputes. Every case started in the lower courts. It worked its way through an organized structure of appeals. Pharaoh was the final tribunal. Eventually satisfactory resolution was found. Most cases were settled long before they reached the highest chambers of justice.

Moses grew up in Egypt. He knew their judicial system. But, for whatever reason, he did not follow it. He served as the sole judge in Israel. The task was all-consuming, *Exodus* 18:13. He had not delegated his authority to anyone. Perhaps, he distrusted their ability. They had only recently been freed from slavery.

- **Mistake of Moses.** The great leader of Israel was now eighty years old, *Exodus* 7:7. He often felt unable to carry the burden of his position, *Exodus* 18:18; *Numbers* 11:11,14. His duties were probably manageable at the beginning. Yet, in time, they escalated into an overwhelming encumbrance, *Deuteronomy* 1:9-12. Moses had likely entertained the idea of reform. Recasting the framework of an entrenched system can be difficult. The people might balk. So the aged leader plodded on.

- **Advice of Jethro.** Moses’ father-in-law saw the problem, *Exodus* 18:14. Moses accepted the responsibilities of his position, *Exodus* 18:15. Though, admirable, he was not carrying them out in an efficient manner, *Exodus* 18:17. It was not “beneficial,” “pleasant,” nor “favorable.” Moses could not effectively function in his office. And the people were frustrated at the delay of justice. It was a lose-lose situation. Jethro advised establishing a series of lower courts to ease the heavy work load, *Exodus* 18:21,22.

Advice is seldom welcome. Those who need it the most tend to like it the least. But the proposal of Jethro was immediately adopted, *Exodus* 18:24. Moses saw the wisdom of his father-in-law’s counsel, *Proverbs* 9:9; 13:10. A huge distraction was lifted off of his shoulders. Moses was able to focus on an infinitely better purpose, *Exodus* 18:20.

“If you do this, and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied,” *Exodus* 18:23.

The neglect of dividing responsibilities in Christian labor is a serious mistake. It overburdens the leadership. It delays getting things done. It stymies the development of new talent. It creates frustration. God does not want the Church to operate in that way, *1 Peter* 4:10,11.

*Lord, it is important to utilize the abilities of all the saints. The Church grows best when everyone does their part. The world is full of those who do not share their power. May I not be one of them. In Christ, who allows me to participate in His rescue mission, Amen.*
“Not many of you should presume to be teachers,” James 3:1.

The office of a teacher is an important position, Ephesians 4:11-13. Teachers are “a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark,” Romans 2:19. The profession carries prestige in the community of the faithful. But it also has responsibilities, Romans 2:21-24. James advises against assuming the vocation of a teacher—unless one is qualified.

“Not many of you should presume to be teachers,...because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly,” James 3:1.

Many did not heed the warning. They succumbed to the hazards of the craft. Some disturbed the brethren by advocating false doctrines, Acts 15:24. Others blundered ahead without sufficient knowledge, I Timothy 1:7; 6:3-5. They brought judgment upon themselves, Matthew 5:19.

- **Responsibility of teachers.** James did not intend to discourage those who are “qualified to teach others,” II Timothy 2:2. He simply warned people about the heavy responsibilities involved in teaching, Acts 20:26,27. Instruction relies on speaking. It requires using the tongue. Therein lies the danger, James 3:2. Teaching depends on the most unruly member of the body, James 3:5,6. The power of the tongue is legendary, James 3:9,10. Though small is size, it has a huge influence, James 3:3,4.

- **Vulnerability of teachers.** The less people think the more they talk. The more they talk the less likely they will remain blameless, Proverbs 10:19. Teachers talk. They are vulnerable. Many words bring much responsibility, Luke 12:48. James issued a warning. “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak,” he said, James 1:19. But, unfortunately, the less people know the more they desire to teach.

While the office of a spiritual instructor is honorable, it is difficult to maintain with honor. It demands keen insight, knowledge of scripture, and abundant patience (which few people possess). Spiritual leaders must be “able to teach.” They must be mature in the faith, I Timothy 3:2,6. One without the other is a recipe for disaster.

Teachers will be “judged more strictly,” James 3:1. God will hold them accountable. Since they teach His word, they will be judged by His word, Hebrews 4:12. Teachers should pray for His instruction before they instruct others, Psalms 25:4,5,9.

Father, Your word is my guide. I pray that I may saturate my heart with it. Then, when I walk in Your way, I will be able to teach others to do the same. Bless my tongue. May it be a blessing. In Christ Jesus, the Master Teacher, Amen.
Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light,” Micah 7:8.

The happy days were gone. Misery was everywhere, Micah 7:1. The grace of heaven had disappeared. The godly were carried off into captivity. Those that remained in the land were bent on doing evil, Micah 7:2,3. No one could be trusted, Micah 7:5,6. So the prophet put his hope in God.

“As for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior,” Micah 7:7.

In spite of horrendous circumstances, the faithful wait for Jehovah. He is their salvation, Psalms 27:9. The enemy gloats over the distress of Israel, Micah 7:8; cf. Psalms 42:3; 79:10; 115:2-8; Joel 2:17. But the glistening will cease. The misery of Israel was temporary. They would soon be redeemed. The unimaginable will happen. The conquerors will be conquered, Micah 7:9,10.

• Darkness. Adverse situations are a common part of life. Every sailor encounters storms. Every pilgrim gets sand in his shoes. No one need be surprised. That is the way God made human existence, Ecclesiastes 7:14. Hardships are an integral part of the agenda. They come in many forms: misunderstandings, ill-treatment, disappointments, failure, and bereavement. They refine our faith, 1 Peter 1:6,7. They test our heart and cleanse our mind. Viewed from heaven, trials are a blessing, James 1:2-4. “Though I sit in darkness,” Micah said, “the Lord will be my light,” Micah 7:8b.

• Light. Light dispels darkness. Because of the light, that which was concealed is made known, John 3:19-21. Moreover, in the gloomiest of times, the light of heaven will bring gladness to a heavy heart, Psalms 107:10-14; Isaiah 9:2,3. It was so for Jacob, cf. Genesis 42:36 and 45:25-28. It was so for Elijah, cf. 1 Kings 19:3-5,9b,10 and 19:15-18. It was so for Israel, cf. Psalms 123:1-4 and 126:1-6. And it is so for us today, Isaiah 60:20. God will chasten His people but He will not violate His grace.

Micah waited for the Lord, Micah 7:7. He waited because the love of God will always be made known. His purposes will always come to pass. Therefore, believers quietly endure. They will draw strength from their faith to bear the dark days, Psalms 130:5,6.

The faith of the faithful will be vindicated, Isaiah 25:9. In true heroism, His people will confront every difficulty. In calm resignation, they will subdue every sorrow. This power to overcome is not their strength. It is a gift from God. He will rescue His own, Psalms 22:5; Isaiah 12:2.

Kind Father, I take my cue from Christ. He endured the cross. He scorned the shame. He is now at Your right hand. I want to be there, too. In Him, Amen.
“Your hearts must be fully committed,” I Kings 8:61.

Hope was in the air. The temple was finally finished. During the dedication ceremony, Solomon blessed the people, I Kings 8:54,55. He thanked God for keeping His promises, I Kings 8:56. The future was secure—if Israel would “carefully follow all His commands,” Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

“But your hearts must be fully committed,” Solomon prayed, I Kings 8:61.


- **Relationship of prayer to practice.** The Lord responded favorably to the prayer of Solomon, I Kings 9:3. If the king was faithful, God would bless him, I Kings 9:4-5. If he turned away, his prayer would be a mockery, I Kings 9:6-9. The dedication service was over. Everyone would be leaving the temple. They were about to reenter ordinary life. The mundane waited. Former responsibilities faced them. Repairs must be made. Family obligations had to be met. The vows made in the temple must be lived in the market place, Philippians 2:12. The passions of a sacred moment must become the practices of profane existence. The faithful must complete their weekend worship in week day obedience, Deuteronomy 29:9-15.

- **Relationship of practice to thought.** It is one thing to make a vow. It is quite another to complete it. Solomon prayed for finishers. He envisioned those who would “fight the good fight,” who would “finish the race,” who would “keep the faith,” II Timothy 4:7,8. That fight, that race, that faith touched every aspect of life. It encompassed the spiritual. It demanded the practical. It involved all the soul, all the heart, all the mind, and all the strength, Mark 12:30. Deeds alone were not enough. Words alone would not suffice. To be a finisher, the Lord must rule the thoughts. A “pure heart” was the driving force behind the “fully committed,” Psalms 51:10,11.

Sadly Solomon failed. “His heart was not fully devoted to the Lord,” I Kings 11:4-6. Beneath a dedicated exterior can lay the latent germs of sin. A gentle nudge of outward incentives can push these evil inclinations into full rebellion. The purest religious emotion can be corroded by the simplest forms of temptation. “He who trusts in himself is a fool,” Proverbs 28:26; cf. I Corinthians 10:12. Our only hope is found in the purity that God alone can provide, John 1:7. May He help us to be fully committed.

*Lord, it is easy to make a vow. It demands much more to finish it. May I be a finisher—one who completes the race, one who keeps the faith. Empower me. I cannot do it alone. Through Jesus, my Example, who finished, Amen.*
December 18

“The Lord is the one who sustains me,” Psalms 54:4.

David was on the run. King Saul was in hot pursuit, I Samuel 23:14. The people in the town of Ziph betrayed David. They told Saul that the fugitive was living among them, I Samuel 23:19,20. How could men be so cruel? Psalms 54:3. Who could be trusted? David turned to the Lord.

“Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me,” Psalms 54:4.


The believer can rest safely even in dire circumstances, Isaiah 43:5. God supports His own in sickness, Psalms 41:3. He will uphold them in their sunset years, Isaiah 46:4. The Lord is always available to lean on, to uphold, and to support His people.

- **Faith inspires confidence.** Faith brings the believer into the presence of God. It remembers who He is. It recalls what He promised, Psalms 119:116. Faith provides courage to hold on when there is every reason to let go, Romans 8:31.

- **Confidence anticipates deliverance.** The nearer we get to God—the more we make His will our will—the more certain we are of eventual deliverance, Psalms 51:12. We envision the victory. We see the end. There will be clouds but the sun shines above them. There will be struggles but the trophy is in reach, Psalms 55:22. The Lord will intervene, Isaiah 59:15,16. He will complete what He began in us, Philippians 1:6.

- **Deliverance awakens praise.** David was sure of his deliverance. Hence, even before it happened, he broke out in jubilant praise, Psalms 54:6,7. Many forget to thank God when their stress is past, Luke 17:12-18. The righteous remember. They praise Him from whom all blessings flow.

The faithful see the future as if it was the present. Though surrounded by his enemies, David could confidently reach out for the helping hand of God, Psalms 37:23,24. The peace of his happy tomorrow was enjoyed in his turbulent today. This was so because he loved God, I John 4:16,17. Faith rejoices in victory before the battle begins.

December 19

“Your accent gives you away,” Matthew 26:73.

Peter stood in the middle of a whirlwind. Events unfolded faster than he could process them. He struggled to understand. Jesus was honored by the triumphal entry. He spoke of His throne. He worked miracles. He demonstrated His divine power. He instituted the Lord’s Supper. Surely, the kingdom was at hand.

Then, suddenly, out of nowhere, the hopes of Peter were dashed. Jesus was betrayed. He was arrested. And, in His arraignment, He stood condemned. The King was treated like a criminal. Things were not supposed to turn out this way. Peter could not make sense of the scenario.

- **Wrong place.** Peter observed the drama “at a distance.” He sat down with the enemy, Matthew 26:58. Certainly they would be no help in sorting out the confusion of the moment, Psalms 119:115. Nevertheless, there Peter sat among those who were participants in the greatest crime of all time.

- **Wrong company.** A young girl proved to be his undoing, Matthew 26:69. Peter had a noble opportunity to stand for the truth. But he disgraced himself, Matthew 26:70. The temptation was so slight. The girl meant no harm. She was merely curious. Peter unraveled, I Corinthians 15:33. He walked away in shame, Matthew 26:71. Doubtless Peter was trying to be inconspicuous. But the girl followed him, Mark 14:69. The brash disciple became the blubbering fool, Matthew 26:72.

- **Wrong accent.** Peter was a Galilean. Folks from the north pronounced sh as th. Hence, instead of saying, “the sheep should be in the shed,” Peter would have said, “the theep thould be in the thed.” Obviously his speech betrayed him, Matthew 26:73. Peter was exposed. There was nothing he could do. The cascade of events that encircled Christ had imprisoned Peter.

To add insult to injury, the relatives of Malchus were there. They recognized Peter as the one in Gethsemane who had cut off the ear of their kinsmen, John 18:26. The noose was tightening. Fear was increasing. The denial became more vehement, Matthew 26:74.

Wisdom seeks her strength in God alone;
Even an angel would be a fool to trust his own.

To view the fall of Peter is to witness the weakness of ourselves. His story can easily be our story. We must watch and pray, I Corinthians 16:13. The tempter lurks nearby.

*Father, I must be careful. The wrong company can lead to disaster. I want no part of denying Your Son. In Him, who I proudly claim as my Savior, Amen.*
Why did Israel exist? What was her purpose? Solomon asked God to maintain her cause, I Kings 8:49. He wanted the Lord to “uphold the cause of His people,” I Kings 8:59. Jehovah chose Israel. “I will take you as My own people,” He said, Exodus 6:7a; cf. Ezekiel 11:20b. They became His treasured possession. God made an agreement with them. He would bless them if they would obey Him, Exodus 19:3-6. God did this for no other nation on earth, Deuteronomy 4:32-40.

The Lord redeemed them from slavery. He guided them across a barren desert. He settled them in a land not their own. The neighboring nations saw His power in them. They were terrified, Exodus 15:11-18.

- **Called to serve.** God selected Israel to mirror His greatness, I Kings 8:41-43. Israel was chosen not solely for her sake but primarily for the sake of others. His calling was not so much a privilege but an obligation. God chose Israel to be a channel—rather than a storehouse—of blessing to the world. If this responsibility was ignored, election became the reason for her rejection, Amos 3:2. The cause of Israel was to show the grandeur of God. Jehovah rescued Israel in order to rescue humankind.

- **Saved to bless.** By herself, Israel was nothing, Deuteronomy 7:7-9. Israel was chosen by grace. God blessed her (though she did not deserve the blessing). He blessed her in order that she may bless others, Genesis 12:3; 22:17,18; 26:4; 28:14. Israel was to be a magnet to draw other nations to God. Glimpses of her assignment are scattered throughout the prophets, Isaiah 2:2-4; 56:6-8; Jeremiah 3:17; Zephaniah 3:9,10. Israel was to bring the nations to the Lord, Isaiah 19:23-25.

Israel did not go to the nations. The nations would come to her in order to find God. She was a lighthouse for the Gentiles, Isaiah 49:6. The nations were to come in response to the acts of God in Israel. They were to become beneficiaries of her election.

“Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, and the inhabitants one city will go to another and say, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going.’ And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat Him,” Zechariah 8:20-22.

But Israel failed. She failed to make visible the kingdom of God. She lost her special place. Therefore, her assignment was transferred to the Church, Ephesians 3:10. Her cause became our cause—to bring the nations to the Lord. However, the Church cannot inherit the promises of Israel unless she discharges the tasks of Israel.

Lord, You chose me to reflect You. The privilege is great. The honor is huge. The work is daunting. Bless me for Your sake. In Jesus name, Amen.
December 21


To most people, God is distant, vague, and abstract. Hence, people call Him the One, the Supreme, or the Absolute. For them, God is intangible. He is an “it” rather than a person. For these people, religion is not about relationship. Piety is a matter of vibrations, force fields, and energy clusters.

To the Christian, however, God is a person—a reality that lives within. He is our Maker, our Redeemer, and our Shepherd. The imagery is alive with hope. It enlightens the mind. It calms the soul, Psalms 23:1-3. As sheep, who depend on the Great Shepherd, we shall lack nothing (that is essential), Deuteronomy 2:7; 8:9; Matthew 6:31-33.

- **He makes us lie down in green pastures.** The shepherd “makes” us lie down. In our hurried, relentless society, that is great news, Mark 6:31. The Lord does not want us to remain forever in the fast lane, Matthew 11:28-30.

- **He leads us beside still waters.** In the semi-arid countryside of Palestine, water is scarce. But, when it rains, the dry creek beds become dangerous torrents of water. The shepherd digs a trench with his staff to divert some of the rushing stream into a quiet puddle. There the sheep can safely drink, Revelation 7:13,14,17.

- **He restores our soul.** Sheep have a tendency to wander away. The shepherd risks his life to save the lost sheep, Luke 15:3-7. Humans have a habit of straying off the path, 1 Peter 2:24,25. The word “restore” means to “turn around.” The Lord raises the fallen, refreshes the weak, and rescues the erring. The shepherd cares for the flock because the sheep belong to Him, John 10:11-13.

- **He guides us in paths of righteousness.** After reclaiming the lost sheep, the shepherd leads them in the right way. He is with those who trust Him, Ezra 8:21-23. The shepherd will lead them to pleasant pastures, Psalms 107:1-9. The sheep must follow. He may take the sheep on lengthy detours. He knows the safe path. It is better to take the long way with Him rather than the shortcut without Him!

The psalms refer to God as our shepherd more than any other book in the Bible, Psalms 77:20a; 79:13; 80:1,2; 95:7. He loves and cares for His sheep, John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 5:2-4. God is viewed as a real person. He is concerned for the welfare of His followers. He saves the wayward. He protects the lambs, Isaiah 40:11.

But not everyone can say, “The Lord is my shepherd.” If we are not His, then He is not ours, Matthew 10:32,33. And, if He is not ours, then, He has not restored our soul. He will not lead us to green pastures or to still waters. Is that the way we want it?

*It is reassuring, Lord. You are my guide. Life has many hidden hazards. Rescue me. I am lost without You. Through the Good Shepherd, Amen.*
“Your work will be rewarded,” II Chronicles 15:7.

Asa was a good king. He lead his subjects “to seek the Lord,” II Chronicles 14:2-5. As a religious reformer, he prohibited idolatry. Likely, this was not popular among his people. Nevertheless, he stayed his course, II Chronicles 15:8.

Asa stood against the tide. It was not easy. The country was in the middle of a spiritual drought, II Chronicles 15:3. His own family was tainted by idolatry, II Chronicles 15:16. The Lord sent a prophet to encourage this valiant man, II Chronicles 15:1,2; cf. Deuteronomy 4:29; I Chronicles 28:9; Jeremiah 29:11-13. There was hope if Asa did not grow weary in “doing good,” Galatians 6:9.

“Do not give up, for your work will be rewarded,” II Chronicles 15:7.

- **Hired laborer.** There are different ways of viewing work. For example, a hired hand laborers for pay. He is rewarded precisely for the amount of work he does. So much money for so much labor. It is an easy calculation, an equivalent exchange. But the Lord does not call us to work in that way. We are not day laborers. We do not toil for an hourly wage, Matthew 20:1-15.

- **Faithful volunteer.** The Master invites us to be fellow servants. He calls us to be what He was, to work as He did. He entertained no notion of being paid. He volunteered to serve. He found His full reward in the approval of God, Matthew 25:23. Those who work in the kingdom ask for no reward except to serve Him more.

The scripture often speaks of working for a reward, Jeremiah 31:16; Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:6; I Corinthians 3:8; Revelation 22:12. People understand the idea because it is common in daily life. Hence, believers are encouraged to maintain good works, I Corinthians 15:58; II Thessalonians 3:13; II Timothy 3:16,17; Hebrews 10:23,24.

Christians seek God. And, in doing so, they will find Him, Acts 17:26,27. Their search is expressed in good works. Yet, all the while, they know they are not saved by their good deeds, Ephesians 2:8,9. In other words, believers are not saved because they work, but work because they are saved.


Thank You, Father, for Your encouragement.
My future reward will far exceed my present effort.
I appreciate Your generosity. In Him, who gave
that we might give, Amen.
Christianity has its solemn assemblies. But it is also a practical religion. It is a call to action, to do what is taught. Nowhere is this clearer than in extending hospitality.

“Do not forget to entertain strangers,” Hebrews 13:2.

Hospitality was taken seriously, Job 31:32. It dated back to antiquity, Genesis 18:1-8; 19:1-11; Judges 19:10-21. Hospitality was the background for many details in the life of Jesus and the early Church. It was central to the spread of the Gospel.

• **Hospitality in the Old Testament.** Without motels, hospitality provided much needed assistance to travelers. A guest was treated with respect. He was given food for his animals, supplied water to wash his feet, furnished a bed, and invited to eat at the table of his host, Genesis 24:1-4, 10-14, 22-25, 28-33. Guest rooms in many homes were kept ready for such occasions, II Kings 4:8-10; Philemon 22. The people of God were to “love aliens,” Deuteronomy 10:19. Hospitality was a deeply engrained responsibility in the ancient world. It was a punishable crime to mistreat a stranger, Leviticus 19:33,34.

• **Hospitality in the New Testament.** Jesus depended on hospitality during His ministry, Matthew 8:20. He was a frequent dinner guest in local homes, Luke 7:36; 10:38; 19:5,6; John 12:2. Hospitality was assumed in sending the apostles on the limited commission, Mark 6:7-11. Likewise, hospitality was evident in the extensive travel of the early missionaries, Acts 16:14,15; III John 5-8. Hospitality was also an important part in the qualification of an elder, I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8, and in the decision to support a widow, I Timothy 5:9,10. Christians were kind to all people especially those who belonged to the family of believers, Galatians 6:10. It was their joy to serve, I Peter 4:9.

Not surprisingly such kindness was abused by idlers and pretenders. Hence, precautions were taken. Limits to the duration of a stay were established. Guests were tested for doctrinal soundness, I John 4:1; II John 7-11. Wisdom was needed. Imposters were on the loose. Believers must not be gullible. Discretion was advised.

We have an open door because we have an open heart. We give because we receive, Matthew 10:7,8. We follow in the footsteps of Jesus. He supplied bread to the hungry. He gave alms to the poor. He said that hospitality was a measure of our righteousness, Matthew 25:31-40. He gave us a pattern to follow. To the extent that He lives in us, we live like Him. Therefore, “do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased,” Hebrews 13:16.

*I was a stranger, Lord, but You took me in.  
I was a pilgrim but You gave me a place to stay.  
May Your hospitality be the standard of my kindness. In Jesus name, Amen.*
December 24

“They are not just idle words for you—they are your life,” Deuteronomy 32:47.

Moses was in the sunset of his career, Deuteronomy 31:2. He was passing the baton of leadership to Joshua, Deuteronomy 31:7,8. It was a serious moment in the history of Israel, Deuteronomy 31:14.

In his farewell address, Moses issued the most solemn warning ever spoken by mortal tongue, Deuteronomy 32:46,47. It clarified the value, meaning, and purpose of human existence. “THE WORD OF GOD MUST BE OBEYED,” Moses said. To trifle with the message of heaven is to court disaster. To treat it as trivial is to lose its blessing.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path,” Psalms 119:105.

- **The message of God.** The Lord is a great God—a refuge in difficult times. He is faithful in all He does, Deuteronomy 32:3,4. Sadly, Israel did not live like Him. They were incorrigible, cantankerous, and corrupt, Deuteronomy 32:5,6. They became fat and sassy. They abandoned God, deserted their Creator, Deuteronomy 32:15-18. The Lord threatened to punish them, Deuteronomy 32:23-25. But He withheld His wrath for fear His actions would be misunderstood, Deuteronomy 32:26,27. God was patient. He waited. He hoped. It was all in vain, Deuteronomy 32:34,35.

- **The urgency of obedience.** Amid all the changes in life there is one unchanging truth. Upon that truth life depends. GOD MUST BE OBEYED, Deuteronomy 32:45,46. The message of Moses was respected by Jesus, Matthew 5:17. Like Moses, the Lord demanded obedience, too. John 5:46,47. Though the Son of God was greater than Moses, His message (in this regard) was the same, Hebrews 3:5,6. But the people of Israel harden their hearts, Hebrews 3:7-11. We must not do as they did, Hebrews 3:12-19. All hope for eternal life depends on how we respond to His word, I Timothy 4:8. If the Lord did not allow His message through Moses to be ignored, surely He will not allow us to disregard His Son, Hebrews 10:26-29.

This is not a trivial matter, Deuteronomy 32:47. Life is found in the words of God, Deuteronomy 30:15,16. If we obey them, we will live, Jeremiah 38:20; Amos 5:4-6. “Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord,” Deuteronomy 8:3.

The messengers of God issued their cautions. They uttered their warnings. Their message never changed. GOD MUST BE OBEYED, James 1:22. Human responsibility is the same. We must do what the Lord says. Are we paying “careful attention?” Hebrews 2:1-4. Do we faithfully follow all the words of our God? Life and death hang in the balance!

*Lord, there is no hope apart from You. I respect Your message. I intend to obey You today, tomorrow, and forever. Because You have the words of life, Amen.*
She was just a young girl—unmarried but pregnant. How could that be? Mary explained her situation in the most unusual way. What was conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit, she insisted, Matthew 1:18-20. Her peers snickered. “Yeah…just like water runs uphill!”

But, on second thought, the Holy Spirit was central to the existence of the world, Genesis 1:2; Psalms 104:30. The Spirit also made human beings, Job 33:4. Why, then, should one doubt the explanation of Mary?

The Spirit was the Creator of the earth, the Giver of life, John 6:63a. Certainly, then, Jesus could come into history as a direct work of the power of God. That power brought Him to dwell among us, Matthew 1:23. Immanuel came to restore life to a fallen creation, provide help to the weak and weary, Matthew 11:28.

- **Virgin birth.** Jesus already existed before the beginning of the world, John 1:1,2,14. His birth was not the originating of a new person. It was the implanting of a preexistent divine being within the human family. Jesus was the son, “so it was thought,” of Joseph, Luke 3:23, though He was really the “Son of God,” Luke 1:26-35. The supernatural origin of His earthly existence began with an extraordinary birth.

- **Divine nature.** The human name “Jesus” described His purpose. He came to save people from their sins, Matthew 1:21. His divine name “Immanuel” revealed His nature. He was the union of deity and humanity, Philippians 2:6,7. While in the flesh, He was “the exact representation” of God, Hebrews 1:3. Two natures existing in one person. His deity remained deity. His humanity remained humanity. Christ was the mystery of God among men, Colossians 2:2.

- **Sacred presence.** Immanuel is a reminder. He lived under our limitations. He experienced the restrictions of the human frame. He was truly one of us, Hebrews 2:11. He knows our struggles. He is aware of our difficulties. He is completely sympathetic with the hassles we face, the burdens we bear, Hebrews 2:17,18; 4:15,16; 7:25. God with us means God understands us.

God was born of man so that man might be born of God. The same Spirit that brought Jesus to life restores life to the followers of Jesus. “The mind of the sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life,” Romans 8:6. Immanuel gave us a glimpse of God. Now His divine power “has given us everything we need for life and godliness,” II Peter 1:3. We saw God. Now the world can see God in us. It is time to let our light shine, Matthew 5:14-16.

*O, Father, more than anything else, I want to be like You. To know Your mind, to speak Your words, to walk in Your truth, is my desire. Help me be an Immanuel. Through Him, who was God with us, Amen.*
December 26


History has a way of repeating itself. Humankind disobeys God. Then God sends a corrective punishment. Such was the familiar scenario in the days of Jeremiah. A severe drought was crippling the land, Jeremiah 14:1-6.

It was time to take stock, to appraise personal behavior. Things were not going right because folks were not doing right, Proverbs 1:24-28; 28:9; Isaiah 1:15; 58:3,4. The people went to the temple. But they were careless in their daily life, Jeremiah 12:4,11.

The Lord withdrew from His people. They had already withdrawn from Him, Jeremiah 13:22-25; 14:10. The absence of God gave meaning to their hunger. The retreat of heaven prompted the repentance of the people. Adversity provided an occasion for faith to grasp what it could not see, Jeremiah 14:19-21.

- **God was a stranger.** Men often fail to recognize the Lord when He visits. They grope along their Emmaus Road oblivious to His presence, Luke 24:13-16. Humans have temporary visitations instead of abiding companionship. They catch fleeting glimpses rather than permanent light. God (to them) is like a stranger, a passing traveler, Jeremiah 14:8. Thus, He may be near to them without being received by them. He saw their need without being accepted as their Savior, Jeremiah 15:5,6.

- **God was their hope.** The people eventually realized they were the problem. They also recognized that God alone could rescue them, Jeremiah 14:7. The Lord was their hope, Psalms 39:7,8; 42:5; 146:5,6. Jehovah is often forgotten in prosperity. He is always remembered in trouble. He did not prevent His people from falling. But He was there to catch them when they fell.

- **God offered grace.** In slow stages of recovery—marked by frequent relapses—the people rediscovered the truth. The Lord was among them, Jeremiah 14:9. They bore His name. They were His people. He was their hope, their salvation, Jeremiah 14:22. They begged for mercy without an apparent answer of grace. God seemed like a deceptive brook, an unreliable spring, Jeremiah 15:18. Jehovah took His time, Jeremiah 15:15. Man finally repented. Their change of attitude softened the heart of God, Jeremiah 15:19.

The Lord stepped forward. He saved His people, Jeremiah 15:21. He acted for the sake of His name, Jeremiah 14:7a. He forgave. He restored. Uncertainty was replaced by assurance. His absence was replaced by His presence. He made Himself known. He rescued His people. They sought Him and found Him, Jeremiah 29:13. Praise the name of the Lord!

Father in heaven, You made Your move. You gave Your Son. Now it is my turn. I must repent. Then I will see Your glory, will experience Your grace. Let me not miss this grand opportunity. In Jesus, the hope of my salvation, Amen.

In order to strengthen his new converts, Paul wrote a letter to encourage them. He said they were unfairly treated by the local people, II Thessalonians 1:3,4. The apostle advised patience. When Christ returns, their troublers would be “paid back,” II Thessalonians 1:5-10. “With this in mind,” Paul told the Thessalonians he constantly prayed for them.

I do not know if the answer sought will come in the way I thought; But I fervently pray to Him alone whose way is wiser then my own.

• **Our conduct must reflect our calling.** Christians are called—called according to the purpose of God, Romans 8:28. It is a high, holy, and heavenly calling, Philippians 3:13,14; I Thessalonians 4:7; II Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 3:1. It is an invitation to fellowship with Christ, live in peace, and take hold of eternal life, I Corinthians 1:9; Colossians 3:15; I Timothy 6:12. Because of the enormity of its implications, every Christian should pray to “live worthy of the calling” he has received, Ephesians 4:1; cf. I Thessalonians 3:13; II Peter 1:10.

• **Our endurance must complete our intentions.** Good people delight in doing good. God put that desire in each of us, Ephesians 2:10. Therefore, we are designed to eagerly “do what is good,” Titus 2:14, to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds,” Hebrews 10:24. Christian living is a divine activity in submissive saints. It is the power of God at work in those who believe, Ephesians 1:18-20; cf. I Peter 1:3-5.

• **Our behavior must glorify our Lord.** Paul was concerned for the “name which is above every name,” Philippians 2:9. It is the name to whom we belong, James 2:7. That name is honored (or dishonored) by the way we think, speak, and act, I Corinthians 10:31. Let us, therefore, praise the name of the Lord, Psalms 145:1,2. “For His name alone is exalted,” Psalms 148:13.

When Christ returns, His radiant splendor will shine, Matthew 25:31. The saints will welcome their King, admire His beauty, and “share in His glory,” Romans 8:17. What a breath taking truth! We glorify Christ and Christ glorifies us. It is a two-way street—glory flowing in both directions. “We pray this so the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him,” II Thessalonians 1:12. Can there be any higher privilege? Can there be any greater blessing?

*Father, this is my constant prayer. It is the voice of my heart, the groaning of my spirit. I want to be what You designed me to be, to live as You asked me to live. I pray that I will fulfill Your calling, complete my good intentions, and honor Your name. In Him who is coming soon, Amen.*
“Where now is the Lord,” II Kings 2:14.

The prophet Elijah was about to be taken up to heaven, II Kings 2:1. His departure was eminent. Elisha knew it. The other prophets knew it, too. But Elisha could hardly bear discussing it, II Kings 2:3,5.

Elisha clung to Elijah, II Kings 2:2,4,6. He could not stand losing his mentor. As the final hour approached, Elisha was sensing his loss. When close associates are slipping away, we keenly realize the blessing of their presence, John 13:33,36. So it was with Elijah and Elisha.

The two men came to the Jordan River. It was obvious God was with Elijah, II Kings 2:8; cf. Exodus 14:21,22. Would He be with Elisha? Elisha hoped so, II Kings 2:9. Then, with little warning, Elijah was gone. “As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind,” II Kings 2:11.

• Divine power doubted. The responsibility of spiritual leadership weighed heavily on the shoulders of Elisha. Could he fill the sandals of Elijah? Did he have the power of his predecessor? Elisha had his mantle, II Kings 2:13. Could he do what Elijah did? The best way to know was to try. So Elisha took the cloak of Elijah. He struck the water just like the older prophet, II Kings 2:14a,b. He sought confirmation from the Lord.

• Divine presence manifested. The river stopped flowing again, II Kings 2:14c. Elisha did what Elijah had done. Now the young prophet knew. He knew God was with him. He knew he could expect great things from God if he attempted great things for God. Does this not also apply to us? Luke 11:11-13. Do we believe in the promises of God? Do we not have His solemn assurance? Matthew 28:20b. Why should our efforts be so feeble? It was clear that the spirit of Elijah was resting on Elisha, II Kings 2:15.

The company of the prophets knew Elijah was departing. Elisha knew he was gone. The reality of his absence was slow to dawn on them. The company of the prophets wanted to search for Elijah. Maybe he had only been removed a short distance. Elisha knew a search was futile but allowed them to look, II Kings 2:16-18.

No blessing is greater than a constant sense of His abiding presence.

There is something beautiful about our longing to see the departed. But, an extended brooding over the loss, is counterproductive, II Samuel 12:15-23; cf. Ecclesiastes 3:4. We should mourn but move on. There is still work to do. What the loved one started needs to be completed. Past memories must empower present obligations.

God, help me see the wider picture when life focuses on a narrow event. Time marches on. Heaven is still ahead. May I always reach for the prize of the goal that is now beyond my grasp. Through Christ, who left but will return, Amen.

Life is confusing. The wicked prosper. The righteous barely make ends meet, Job 21:7-16; Jeremiah 12:1,2. It is not fair. But God is just. In due time, He will act. Therefore, be patient. Do not fret, Psalms 37:1-9. Otherwise, harsh things will be said against the Lord, Malachi 3:13-15.

The psalmist was troubled by the inequity among men. He nearly lost his faith, Psalms 73:2,3. He struggled to understand, Psalms 73:4-12. Eventually he found a satisfactory explanation, Psalms 73:13-20. His perplexity gave way to confidence in the Lord, Psalms 73:21-26.

- **Need of guidance.** Humans often think they are self-sufficient. In such cases, conceit is not far behind. Dependence on heaven seems unnecessary. Arrogance becomes a way of life, Psalms 12:3,4. The stronger, the richer, and the wiser plot and scheme the mischief they want to do. They avoid divine guidance. They assume they can chart their own course. Nothing could be further from the truth, Isaiah 55:8,9. Man cannot predict the future. He has no idea when (or how) his life will end. He gropes along in a thick fog of ignorance.

- **Desire for guidance.** It is one thing to admit to a lack of knowledge. It is quite another to desire the counsel of God. Are we living like our future is hidden from our sight? Have we quit relying on our own wisdom? Are we ready to surrender, to follow His way? Psalms 25:4,5. It is easy to believe God can guide. It is far more difficult to pray the Gethsemane prayer, Matthew 26:36-42. We tend to go astray, Isaiah 53:6. But the Lord promises to “give us all things” needed for the journey, Romans 8:32.

- **Assurance of guidance.** God will provide, Matthew 7:7,8. He will guide all who follow Him, Psalms 25:9; 32:8; 48:14. To accept His guidance is more than a cry for help. It is more than a surrender of self will. It is a confession of faith, Psalms 31:3. It is a beacon of hope breaking through the mist of doubt. It is a ray of sunshine piercing the clouds of despair.

    “You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward
    You will take me into glory,” Psalms 73:24.

Why do the ungodly prosper? Because they are “men of this world whose reward is in this life,” Psalms 17:14. Why does God not give the faithful their reward now? Because He is preparing them for the hereafter, II Corinthians 4:16-18. That is the difference between living in this world and waiting for the next world, John 14:1-3. A true believer allows the near future to remain uncertain because he is confident of what the distant future will be, II Corinthians 5:1; I John 3:2.

    Jehovah God, I know because You have told me so. Continue
to guide me through this barren land. Show me the way. Lead
me to glory. If You direct my steps, I am certain I will get there.
In Jesus, my Lord and my Guide, Amen.
“Come near to God and He will come near to you,” James 4:8.

The Lord demands much. He asks people to submit themselves, to come to Him. He wants them to purify their hearts, to change their ways. He expects humility, Matthew 23:12. Indeed, He wants much. But He gives much more, James 4:6a. He “gives generously to all without finding fault,” James 1:5.

The first step in Christian living can be the most difficult. Nevertheless, even the initial move is assisted by God, Psalms 10:17. He supplies the impulse to come. He runs to meet the returning prodigal. He throws a party to welcome sinners home, Luke 15:11-24.

He who comes near
Will not come alone;  
There is no reason for fear  
When the Lord calls men home.

• Submit to God, James 4:7a. It is easy to play the game, to ask for blessings in order to use them for our own pleasure, James 4:3. God is not amused, James 4:4. The Lord demands complete trust, Psalms 62:8; 125:1; Proverbs 3:5,6. Submission is central to genuine religion, Psalms 66:1-4; cf. Ephesians 5:24; Hebrews 12:9. “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble,” James 4:6. Submission is not a natural inclination of humankind, Romans 10:3. At the very least, it requires making the blood of Jesus our only plea. It requires making the Holy Spirit our sole source of righteousness.

• Come to God, James 4:8a. Submitters do not stand still. They deliberately move closer to the Lord. What a privilege to leave the shadows of sin and walk in the sunshine of grace! People draw near to God in worship, Psalms 5:7,8. The Lord will come to them when they come to Him, John 14:23. The act of coming near involves repentance. It includes willing acts of obedience, James 4:7-9. Jesus is tugging at our hearts. He initiates. We reciprocate, John 6:44,65. The process begins in humility and ends in glory, James 4:10.

The terms for coming to God are clearly stated. The goal is to eventually stand in the presence of the Almighty. It is to finally hear Him say, “Well done good and faithful servant...come and share in your master’s happiness,” Matthew 25:23.

The steps for getting there are equally clear. The tempter must be resisted, Ephesians 4:26,27; 6:11; I Peter 5:8,9. Sin must be abandoned, laid aside, and left alone, John 8:11b. And, above all, being with God must become a commitment, an obsession, a lifelong quest, Psalms 73:28; Hebrews 10:19-22.

Lord, the grand ole hymn is a wonderful reminder: “Let my song forever be, nearer my God to Thee.” I resolve to take the steps to come near to You. For, in complete assurance, I know You will come near to me. With humble gratitude, I pray, in Jesus’ holy name, Amen.
December 31

“(My word) will not return to Me empty,” Isaiah 55:11.

The word of God is His message, His command. By His word, heaven and earth were created, Psalms 33:6; 148:5; cf. Genesis 1:3, 6,7, 9,11,14,15,20,21,24. His word gives voice to the laws of nature, Psalms 147:15-18.

It was the word of God that came to the prophets, Jeremiah 1:4; Joel 1:1; Zephaniah 1:1. His word declares “what is right,” Isaiah 45:19. It “sustains the weary,” Isaiah 50:4. His word “stands forever,” Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 24:35.

By His word, Jesus called the dead back to life, John 11:43,44. With a word, Christ cast out demons, Mark 9:25,26. He healed diseases, Matthew 12:13. He calmed the storm, Mark 4:39. Obviously men should pay attention to His powerful word.

• **His word never returns empty.** The phrase “never returns empty” suggests being “fulfilled,” “successful,” or “satisfied,” Genesis 31:42; II Samuel 1:22. The word of God completes its assignment. It always has a goal, an objective, a purpose. It invariably finishes its appointed mission.

• **His word accomplishes His desire.** The term “accomplish” emphasizes what heaven does on earth. God is busy among men, Deuteronomy 29:2; Joshua 23:3. Therefore, in times of distress, men should call on Him to “act,” I Kings 8:37-40. For He does “marvelous things,” Psalms 98:1; Isaiah 25:1. He is constantly busy on behalf of humankind.

• **His word achieves its purpose.** The message of God “prospers.” His will makes it so, Isaiah 53:10. His word does not fail. It achieves its assignment. It completes what He plans for it to do, Psalms 33:11; Proverbs 19:21; Isaiah 14:24,27.

The word of God is like moisture from heaven. The rain and snow come down. They eventually evaporate. However, they do not return above until they have done what they were sent to do below. The same is true of the word of God.

“*As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish...so is My word that goes out from My mouth: it will not return empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it,*” Isaiah 55:10,11.

There are times when we question this truth. We speak the word. The effort seems vain. It appears useless. But God “knows the end from the beginning,” Isaiah 46:10. His word will achieve what He sent it to do. We have no reason to be discouraged.

God, Your word is powerful. It faithfully performs Your bidding. May I do likewise. Send Your word. Empower Your messenger. The results are assured. Through Jesus Christ my Lord, Amen.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GENESIS</td>
<td>4:9</td>
<td>30:20</td>
<td>Jun</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15:1</td>
<td>32:2</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18:12</td>
<td>32:11</td>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18:27</td>
<td>32:47</td>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22:14</td>
<td>33:12</td>
<td>Jun</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27:46</td>
<td>1:16</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45:24</td>
<td>7:9</td>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50:19</td>
<td>8:1</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:13</td>
<td>22:3</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:29</td>
<td>4:14</td>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16:15</td>
<td>5:2</td>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17:7</td>
<td>5:15</td>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18:17</td>
<td>5:23</td>
<td>Jun</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19:6</td>
<td>6:13</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23:20</td>
<td>7:21</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33:16</td>
<td>13:8</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:13</td>
<td>1:16</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:16</td>
<td>7:12</td>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:17</td>
<td>2:3</td>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:1</td>
<td>1:8</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26:18</td>
<td>3:1</td>
<td>Jun</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:23</td>
<td>10:26</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11:14</td>
<td>15:20</td>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11:29</td>
<td>16:7</td>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16:3</td>
<td>17:37</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23:26</td>
<td>20:38</td>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:15</td>
<td>3:16</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:39</td>
<td>30:6</td>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:16</td>
<td>30:24</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:22</td>
<td>1:8</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:21</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13:4</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29:29</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30:6</td>
<td>30:24</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:21</td>
<td>3:16</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13:4</td>
<td>1:8</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29:29</td>
<td>1:8</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOSHUA</td>
<td>4:15</td>
<td>30:6</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:39</td>
<td>30:24</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:16</td>
<td>1:8</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:22</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:21</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13:4</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29:29</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I KINGS</td>
<td>4:15</td>
<td>30:6</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:39</td>
<td>30:24</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:16</td>
<td>1:8</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:22</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:21</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13:4</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29:29</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I CHRONICLES</td>
<td>4:15</td>
<td>30:6</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:39</td>
<td>30:24</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:16</td>
<td>1:8</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:22</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:21</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13:4</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29:29</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II CHRONICLES</td>
<td>4:15</td>
<td>30:6</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:39</td>
<td>30:24</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:16</td>
<td>1:8</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:22</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:21</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13:4</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29:29</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EZRA</td>
<td>4:15</td>
<td>30:6</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:39</td>
<td>30:24</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:16</td>
<td>1:8</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:22</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:21</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13:4</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29:29</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEHEMIAH</td>
<td>4:15</td>
<td>30:6</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:39</td>
<td>30:24</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:16</td>
<td>1:8</td>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:22</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:21</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13:4</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29:29</td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book</td>
<td>Verses</td>
<td>Dates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ESTHER</strong></td>
<td>4:14</td>
<td>Feb 5, 5:1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:16</td>
<td>Jul 12, May 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6:12, Jul 17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:10</td>
<td>Jan 8, 31:33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Oct 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17:3</td>
<td>Apr 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25:2</td>
<td>Feb 23, May 28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26:14</td>
<td>Jul 10, 8:6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28:12</td>
<td>Nov 8, Oct 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40:8</td>
<td>Sep 10, 8:17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11:1</td>
<td>Jul 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JOB</strong></td>
<td>7:10</td>
<td>Jan 8, 31:33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Oct 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17:3</td>
<td>Apr 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25:2</td>
<td>Feb 23, May 28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26:14</td>
<td>Jul 10, 8:6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28:12</td>
<td>Nov 8, Oct 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40:8</td>
<td>Sep 10, 8:17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11:1</td>
<td>Jul 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PSALMS</strong></td>
<td>12:7</td>
<td>Nov 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20:4</td>
<td>Mar 19, 2:15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23:1</td>
<td>Dec 21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39:4</td>
<td>May 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45:1</td>
<td>Mar 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47:8</td>
<td>Oct 29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>49:7</td>
<td>Aug 1, 6:8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54:4</td>
<td>Dec 18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>62:8</td>
<td>May 8, 7:9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73:24</td>
<td>Dec 29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>74:22</td>
<td>Jan 2, 26:3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86:11</td>
<td>Apr 1, 30:15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>90:15</td>
<td>Sep 3, 31:2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>93:1</td>
<td>Jun 18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>108:13</td>
<td>Sep 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>113:1</td>
<td>Oct 15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>113:5</td>
<td>Aug 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>119:105</td>
<td>Jun 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>131:1</td>
<td>Feb 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>142:3</td>
<td>May 17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16:3</td>
<td>Sep 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SONG OF SONGS</strong></td>
<td>1:3</td>
<td>Apr 30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:5</td>
<td>Nov 27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:17</td>
<td>Aug 28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11:5</td>
<td>Jan 31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14:23</td>
<td>Jun 24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECCLESIASTES</strong></td>
<td>1:17</td>
<td>May 30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EZEKIEL</strong></td>
<td>149:7</td>
<td>Aug 24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:12</td>
<td>Jul 17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9:24</td>
<td>Apr 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:23</td>
<td>Aug 25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ESTHER</strong></td>
<td>4:14</td>
<td>Feb 5, 5:1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:16</td>
<td>Jul 12, May 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:1</td>
<td>May 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:12</td>
<td>Jul 17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:10</td>
<td>Jan 8, 31:33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:18</td>
<td>Oct 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LAMENTATIONS</strong></td>
<td>17:3</td>
<td>Apr 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25:2</td>
<td>Feb 23, May 28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26:14</td>
<td>Jul 10, 8:6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28:12</td>
<td>Nov 8, Oct 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40:8</td>
<td>Sep 10, 8:17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11:1</td>
<td>Jul 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ISAIAH</strong></td>
<td>11:5</td>
<td>Jan 31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14:23</td>
<td>Jun 24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LAMENTATIONS</strong></td>
<td>17:3</td>
<td>Apr 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25:2</td>
<td>Feb 23, May 28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26:14</td>
<td>Jul 10, 8:6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28:12</td>
<td>Nov 8, Oct 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SONG OF SONGS</strong></td>
<td>11:5</td>
<td>Jan 31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14:23</td>
<td>Jun 24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LAMENTATIONS</strong></td>
<td>17:3</td>
<td>Apr 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25:2</td>
<td>Feb 23, May 28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26:14</td>
<td>Jul 10, 8:6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28:12</td>
<td>Nov 8, Oct 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SONG OF SONGS</strong></td>
<td>11:5</td>
<td>Jan 31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14:23</td>
<td>Jun 24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LAMENTATIONS</strong></td>
<td>17:3</td>
<td>Apr 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25:2</td>
<td>Feb 23, May 28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26:14</td>
<td>Jul 10, 8:6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28:12</td>
<td>Nov 8, Oct 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SONG OF SONGS</strong></td>
<td>11:5</td>
<td>Jan 31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14:23</td>
<td>Jun 24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LAMENTATIONS</strong></td>
<td>17:3</td>
<td>Apr 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25:2</td>
<td>Feb 23, May 28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26:14</td>
<td>Jul 10, 8:6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SONG OF SONGS</strong></td>
<td>11:5</td>
<td>Jan 31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14:23</td>
<td>Jun 24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
JOEL
2:17 Mar 2
3:14 May 12
3:16 Jun 26

AMOS
3:7 Aug 7
4:12 Feb 14
8:12 Apr 7

ZACHARIAH
1:7 Aug 12
2:13 Mar 29
3:19 Sep 19

MARK
2:3 Jul 8
9:38 Aug 22

LUKE
13:41 Nov 21
16:15 Apr 12

HAGGAI
2:11 Feb 2
3:9 Oct 22
3:17 May 25

ZECHARIAH
1:11 Feb 2
3:9 Oct 22
3:17 May 25

MALACHI
1:11 Feb 2
3:9 Oct 22
3:17 May 25

MATTHEW
10:33 Aug 14
14:31 Nov 21
10:34 Aug 26

ACTS
12:34,35 Jan 3
6:1 Jun 17

MICAH
3:8 Mar 5
7:7 Sep 16
7:8 Dec 16
7:18 Jun 29

NAHUM
10:8 Nov 10
10:16 May 29
1:7 Aug 12
2:13 Feb 18

HABAKKUK
16:23 Dec 12
17:20 May 15
14:31 Nov 21
10:34 Aug 26

MARK
20:22 Sep 30
20:29 Nov 5

ZEPHANIAH
5:35 Feb 16
6:52 Nov 3
24:26 Oct 19

JOHN
1:3 Aug 6
2:8 Apr 16
3:2 Sep 29
4:1 Jan 22

JONAH
1:3 Aug 6
2:8 Apr 16
3:2 Sep 29
4:1 Jan 22

MATTHEW
10:33 Aug 14
14:31 Nov 21
10:34 Aug 26

ACTS
12:34,35 Jan 3
6:1 Jun 17

MICAH
3:8 Mar 5
7:7 Sep 16
7:8 Dec 16
7:18 Jun 29

NAHUM
10:8 Nov 10
10:16 May 29
1:7 Aug 12
2:13 Feb 18

HABAKKUK
16:23 Dec 12
17:20 May 15
14:31 Nov 21
10:34 Aug 26

MARK
20:22 Sep 30
20:29 Nov 5

ZEPHANIAH
5:35 Feb 16
6:52 Nov 3
24:26 Oct 19
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ROMANS</td>
<td>2:12, 3:6</td>
<td>Dec 11, Jun 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:31, 8:37</td>
<td>Aug 29, Nov 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:11, 12:13</td>
<td>Jun 2, Dec 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:17, 14:1</td>
<td>Jan 20, May 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I CORINTHIANS</td>
<td>2:16</td>
<td>Jun 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:1</td>
<td>Aug 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9:19, 11:17</td>
<td>Sep 8, Feb 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15:58, 16:18</td>
<td>Oct 1, Jul 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II CORINTHIANS</td>
<td>1:4</td>
<td>Apr 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:14</td>
<td>Sep 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:12, 13:11</td>
<td>Jul 30, Feb 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I THESSALONIANS</td>
<td>1:3</td>
<td>Oct 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:19, 20</td>
<td>Jan 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:11, 11:17</td>
<td>Jul 4, Dec 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II THESSALONIANS</td>
<td>4:11, 13:11</td>
<td>Jul 4, Feb 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I TIMOTHY</td>
<td>1:18, 2:15</td>
<td>Oct 4, Jun 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:13, 4:16</td>
<td>Jul 24, Aug 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II TIMOTHY</td>
<td>6:9</td>
<td>Nov 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:12</td>
<td>Jan 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I EPHESIANS</td>
<td>2:10, 4:1</td>
<td>Jul 21, Feb 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:16</td>
<td>Sep 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:12</td>
<td>Nov 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II EPHESIANS</td>
<td>3:5</td>
<td>May 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:16</td>
<td>Oct 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:7</td>
<td>Oct 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:11</td>
<td>Jul 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I PHILIPPIANS</td>
<td>1:17, 1:22</td>
<td>May 19, Sep 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:15</td>
<td>Feb 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II PHILIPPIANS</td>
<td>1:15, 1:16</td>
<td>Aug 18, Jan 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:17, 1:22</td>
<td>Jan 23, Jan 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III PHILIPPIANS</td>
<td>1:17, 1:22</td>
<td>May 19, Sep 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:15</td>
<td>Feb 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I TIMOTHY</td>
<td>1:18, 2:15</td>
<td>Oct 4, Jun 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:13, 4:16</td>
<td>Jul 24, Aug 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II TIMOTHY</td>
<td>6:9</td>
<td>Nov 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:12</td>
<td>Jan 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I JAMES</td>
<td>3:1</td>
<td>Dec 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:3</td>
<td>Mar 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II JAMES</td>
<td>4:8</td>
<td>Dec 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II TRADGES</td>
<td>5:5</td>
<td>May 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I JOHN</td>
<td>1:13</td>
<td>Jan 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:13</td>
<td>Jul 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II JOHN</td>
<td>2:16</td>
<td>Sep 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III JOHN</td>
<td>1:1</td>
<td>Jan 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:9</td>
<td>Mar 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHILEMON</td>
<td>1:1</td>
<td>Jan 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:6</td>
<td>Jun 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:9</td>
<td>Mar 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:16</td>
<td>Jan 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:17</td>
<td>May 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:22</td>
<td>Sep 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:15</td>
<td>Feb 22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HEBREWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:7</td>
<td>Aug 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:11</td>
<td>Apr 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:13</td>
<td>Apr 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:4</td>
<td>Feb 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:19</td>
<td>Mar 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:23</td>
<td>Jul 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:32</td>
<td>Sep 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:1</td>
<td>Nov 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:15</td>
<td>May 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:21</td>
<td>Oct 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

JAMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:11</td>
<td>Dec 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:1</td>
<td>Dec 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:3</td>
<td>Mar 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:8</td>
<td>Dec 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:5</td>
<td>May 21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I PETER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:16</td>
<td>Feb 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:8</td>
<td>Aug 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TITUS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:15</td>
<td>Jun 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:6</td>
<td>Mar 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:7</td>
<td>Oct 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:11</td>
<td>Jul 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PHILEMON

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:6</td>
<td>Jun 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:9</td>
<td>Mar 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:16</td>
<td>Jan 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:17</td>
<td>May 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:22</td>
<td>Sep 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:15</td>
<td>Feb 22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
JUDE

1:5    Mar 20
1:22,23 May 31

REVELATION

5:10    Feb 3
7:16    Apr 17
## TOPIC INDEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Date(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abandoned</td>
<td>Oct 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adversity</td>
<td>Apr 5, May 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>Oct 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affliction</td>
<td>May 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>May 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apostasy</td>
<td>Oct 16, Nov 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>Jun 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrogance</td>
<td>Mar 13, Jul 16, Nov 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance</td>
<td>Apr 3, Apr 17, Aug 20, Oct 5, Nov 16, Dec 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awe</td>
<td>Feb 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benediction</td>
<td>Oct 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boast</td>
<td>Apr 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brotherhoood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call</td>
<td>Feb 4, Feb 9, Nov 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause</td>
<td>Dec 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Oct 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Apr 1, Dec 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con unsetration</td>
<td>Mar 16, Sept 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contentment</td>
<td>Jan 8, Apr 14, Jul 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversion</td>
<td>Aug 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conviction</td>
<td>Jan 2, Dec 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>Jan 11, May 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covenant</td>
<td>May 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danger</td>
<td>Nov 5, Dec 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision</td>
<td>Jan 21, May 7, Jun 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deception</td>
<td>Jan 16, Jul 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despair</td>
<td>May 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devil</td>
<td>Nov 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipleship</td>
<td>Jan 18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discouragement
  Feb 21
  May 9

Double Minded
  Feb 13

Doubt
  Nov 14

Encouragement
  Apr 18
  May 20
  Sep 1

Enthusiasm
  Mar 11

Eternity
  Jan 29
  Nov 25

Evangelism
  May 26
  Oct 27

Example
  Jul 11
  Aug 3

Faith
  Feb 5
  Mar 17
  May 15
  Jul 3
  Aug 21
  Dec 13

Fear
  Feb 2
  May 16
  Jun 30
  Sep 11
  Oct 11

Fellowship
  Sep 30

Fool
  Mar 14

Forgiveness
  Jan 14

Freedom
  Mar 21

Giving
  Mar 15
  Jun 3

God
  May 30
  Jun 24
  Jul 7

Government
  Jul 20

Grace
  May 1
  Sep 7

Grace
  May 1
  Sep 7

Gratitude
  Jan 7

Guidance
  May 23
  Aug 25

Habitation
  May 11
  Jul 20

Heart
  May 5
  Nov 3

Heaven
  Jul 1

Helper
  Oct 18

Holiness
  Aug 2

Honor
  Sep 14

Hope
  Oct 4

Hospitality
  Jul 15
  Dec 23

Idolatry
  Apr 16
  Dec 3

Ignorance
  Dec 9

Immanuel
  Dec 25
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immortality</td>
<td>Aug 9</td>
<td>Sep 24</td>
<td>Nov 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>Light</td>
<td>Feb 22</td>
<td>Feb 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jan 20</td>
<td>Feb 25</td>
<td>Mar 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitation</td>
<td>Apr 10</td>
<td>Jun 5</td>
<td>Apr 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Listen</td>
<td>Jun 28</td>
<td>Nov 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apr 20</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dec 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sep 3</td>
<td>Oct 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgment</td>
<td>Lord’s Supper</td>
<td>Feb 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feb 14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jun 27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aug 4</td>
<td>Mar 7</td>
<td>Apr 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aug 19</td>
<td>Jun 11</td>
<td>Jul 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>Mercy</td>
<td>May 31</td>
<td>Aug 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jun 1</td>
<td>Oct 22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dec 11</td>
<td>Nov 17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>Meditation</td>
<td>Sep 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Ministry</td>
<td>Mar 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jul 14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sep 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>Jul 24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jan 19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nov 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dec 14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Money</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pardon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mar 31</td>
<td></td>
<td>Aug 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aug 31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oct 19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie</td>
<td>Nov 26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jun 16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nov 15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Morality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feb 19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td>Motive</td>
<td></td>
<td>Perfection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May 13</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feb 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jul 17</td>
<td>May 19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td>Apr 13</td>
<td>Jul 23</td>
<td>Mar 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repentance</td>
<td>Mar 8</td>
<td>Jul 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persecution</td>
<td>Apr 25</td>
<td>Oct 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>Nov 19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piety</td>
<td>Aug 27</td>
<td>Jun 26</td>
<td>Jul 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praise</td>
<td>Aug 12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oct 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>Aug 29</td>
<td>Sep 25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preach</td>
<td>Aug 18</td>
<td>Jun 19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice</td>
<td>Aug 19</td>
<td>Apr 19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence</td>
<td>Aug 1</td>
<td>Jun 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretense</td>
<td>Aug 14</td>
<td>Nov 28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Apr 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Oct 30 Scriptures Jan 3
       Jan 6       June 4
       Nov 23      Sept 23
Apri 7 Apr 7 Dec 19  June 9
     Dec 19      Nov 4
     Nov 23      Dec 7
    Jan 7
     Dec 8 Stewardship
     Aug 23
Self-delusion
 Jan 9  Self-delusion
     Jan 9
     Strength
June 14  Jan 15
     Feb 24
June 14  Mar 10
Self-examination
 Aug 17  Self-examination
     Aug 17
     Self-examination
Feb 26  Sep 19
Mar 28  May 4
Apr 29  May 28
     March 28
     Apr 29
     Success
     Feb 6
Self-sacrifice
 Sep 8  Self-sacrifice
     Dec 31
     Dec 8
Silence
 Jun 15  September
     Apr 23
Sin
     Teacher
         Teacher
Mar 20  Dec 15
Mar 30  Feb 24
May 4  July 27
May 28  Sep 16
Aug 28  June 12
Sep 26  Dec 1
Dec 5
     Testimony
Single Mindedness
        Testimony
Apr 1  Oct 17
Sovereignty
 Jan 27  Testimony
     Feb 24
     Tolerance
May 14  Jan 28
Jun 18  Aug 22
     Aug 22
     Tolerance
Sep 10  Nov 4
Oct 29  Nov 24
     Trouble
Spirit
 Jan 24  Trouble
       Oct 7
       Oct 29
     Sep 13
Apr 28  Women
       Women
       May 8
Speech
     Work
     Jan 30
     Feb 17
     February
     Feb 27
     May 8
     July 21
Aug 5
Sep 6
Oct 1
Oct 20
Dec 22

Worship
May 3
Sep 9

Zeal
Jan 5
Jun 2